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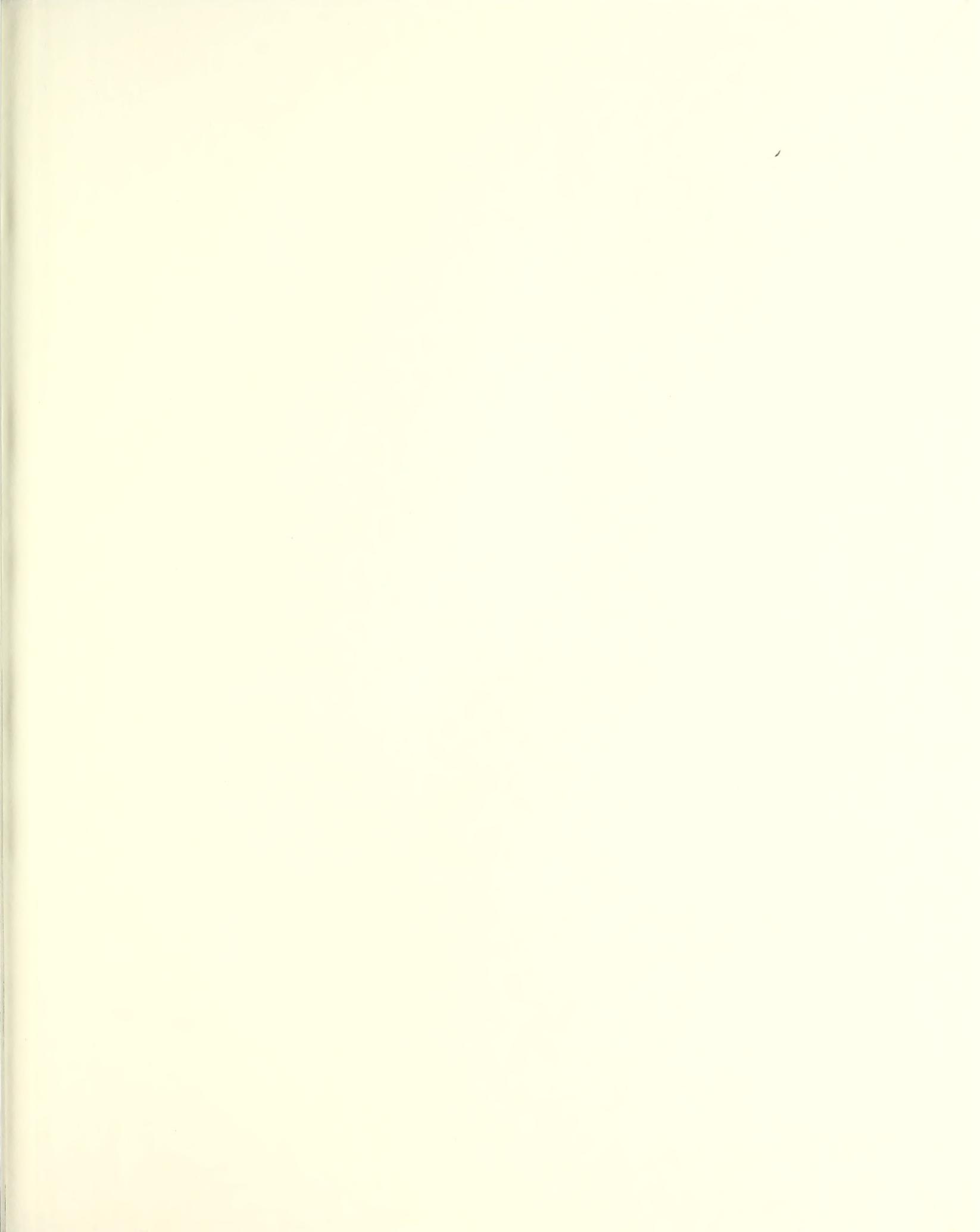
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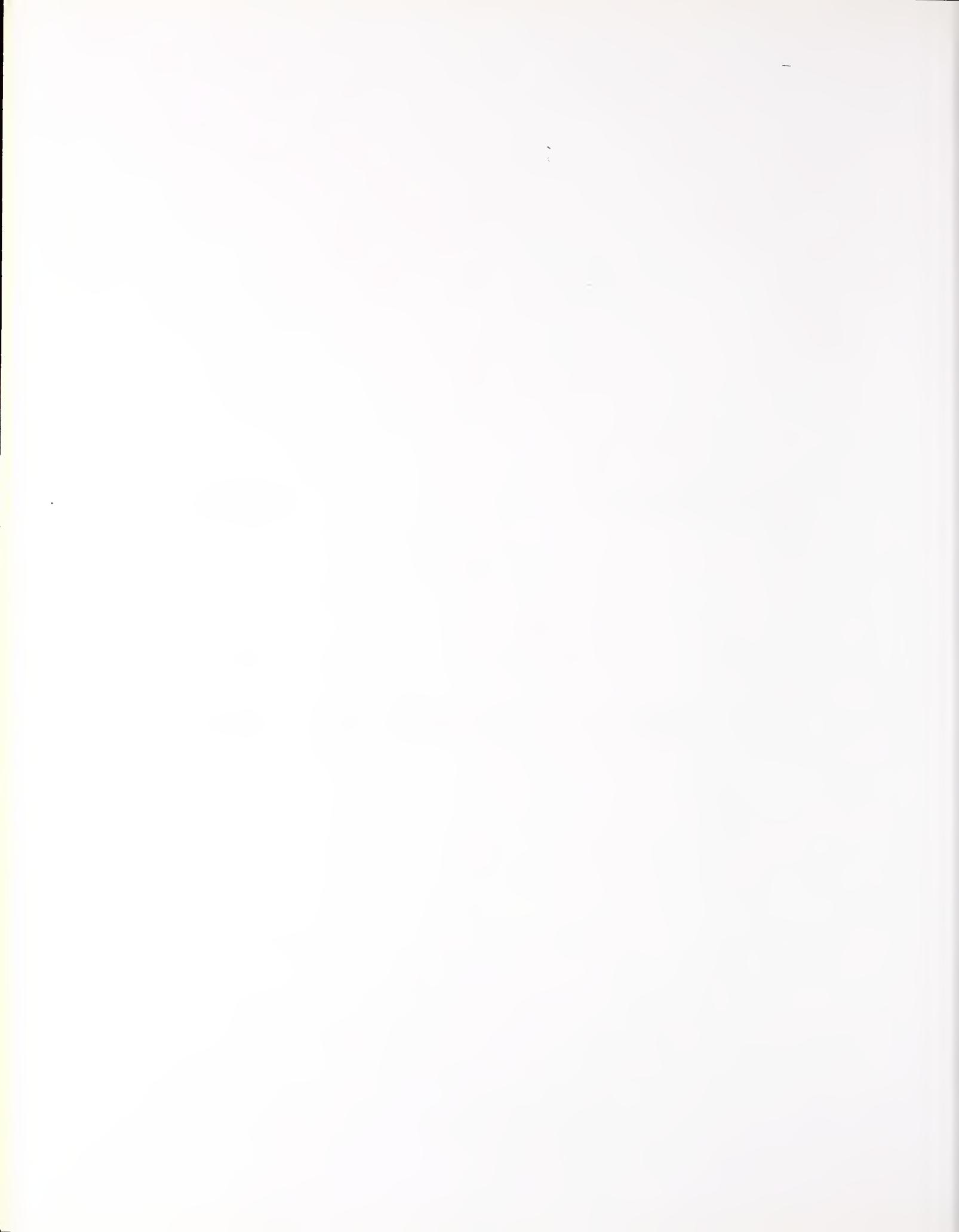






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“My Self-Portrait”

Digital Art

Adriana Uribe

“Truth never plays false roles of any kind, which is why people are so surprised when meeting it. Everyone must decide whether he wants the uncompromising truth or a counterfeit version of the truth. Real wisdom consists of recommending the truth to yourself at every opportunity.”

- Vernon Howard

## P'an Ku

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# Invisible

*Michael Donovan*

At the edge of the street  
The boy sat  
Resting chin in palms and  
Wondering  
Why he had been born,  
Why the night was so cold,  
Why he had to wake up the next day  
In the same pair of pants and the same dirty shirt.

Mother in a trance and father in a box.

Somewhere he felt  
As black as the bruises that the night brings,  
Tasteless fat men with wet tongues  
And soft dollars like cloth thrust  
Into his greedy grasp,  
The redness sticking around for days along with the pain.

Soft snow falling cold on his shoulders, life reminding the boy  
That it was still there and would not go away.  
The boy threw a rock into the air,  
Pissed at something yet not knowing what and actually  
A bit afraid of finding out.  
His numb ignorance his only comfort,  
His breathing body his only friend,  
This life of nothing that he has grown used to  
Has taken him over, it has become him,  
And it is winning the fight.

Sad, pathetic and oh so common the boy scratches  
The rash on his neck, this new rash brought about  
By one or more of the faceless bodies  
That has fucked him or punched him or loved him  
Over the many months.  
The boy looks to the sky then looks down  
As a person passes.  
He doesn't want his face to be seen.  
He doesn't want to be acknowledged – for that  
Would make him a person – for he does not want to be alive.

To be invisible  
Is so much more easy.



“Dylan”

Digital Photograph

Guy Alec Avoth

# I'm Responsible

*Carlos Hermida*

It's 12 midnight  
Just got off work  
I feel tired  
Sleepy  
Cranky  
I don't feel like writing a poem  
But I have to  
Why didn't I write this yesterday  
Procrastinator  
I could be sleeping  
Watching TV  
I feel tired  
Angry  
Pissed  
I don't feel like writing a poem  
But I have to  
I sit here in painless agony  
Smile and press print  
Now I'm going to go watch TV  
And fall asleep  
I didn't feel like writing a poem  
But I did

# Stream

*Aisha McDonald*

A stream of ink forms letters  
On my page  
Transforming it from  
A blank piece of paper  
To a work of art

Abstract thoughts thrown together  
Forming a  
Jigsaw  
Puzzle  
Of words

With the  
Pieces  
Placed  
Precariously  
To complete  
On the sheet  
A poem

Without rhymes  
Without depth  
Without

And I stare at the sheet  
Without feeling

Wishing I could have done better  
But not knowing how



“Ruby”

Graphite Drawing

Sandra Lluis

## The Favor

### Donald Montgomery

On a cold January morning, somewhere in the northeast, a man staggers down through the gray slush and snow on the sidewalk. His stride is wide and hurried. The man soaks in sweat on this bitter cold day. His hands fold over each other and he tucks them inside of his unbuttoned army coat to cover his gut. His blue eyes sparkle. Flurries sparsely come down around the man and between the tall buildings of the city. A hint of the sun peeks over the horizon. Above, a thick sea of dark winter clouds awaits to eclipse it. This side street is empty of traffic. The distant growl of a salt truck is the only sound other than the man's panting.

The only other soul out at this hour is an elderly woman. She takes notice of the man and stops to observe him. She has on a long coat and she holds a large brown paper shopping bag. Her green eyes watch nervously behind her gaudy 1940s eyewear.

The man now staggers. He makes it to the corner and slumps over a newspaper box. The woman across the street from him cautiously approaches. She kneels down, reaches out her free hand to his shoulder. The man, caught by surprise, spins around in a blink. He stands upright. This startles the woman, she almost falls backward. Her paper bag drops and a ceramic piece in the bag breaks. In horror, she raises her hands to cover her mouth at the sight of his bloody hands. He looks at her, or rather through her because he is unaware of what is going on around him. His knees buckle and he falls back against the newspaper box. His back slides down against the metal box until he is sitting in the grimy slush. Nearly unconscious, his hands drop from inside the jacket to reveal a gunshot wound to the stomach. She looks around to ask someone to help, but at this early hour the streets are vacant. The bewildered woman reaches out to the man's shoulders to comfort him.

Her voice trembles. "What should I do? An ambulance? I will call you an ambulance.

Yes?"

His voice is faint and barely audible, "No. Don't bother lady. A lifetime of doin' bad shit gets me this."

"You don't want help?"

"It's too late. Mama always told me that I'd go to hell."

His sparkling eyes dim a bit. The woman hesitates with a thought and then shakes him as violently as her frail frame will allow and abruptly stops.

"No! Please wait! Don't die!"

"Huh?"

"Harold, my husband's name is Harold Reese."

"Wha' the fuck, lady?"

"I need you to tell him that I love him and I never meant to do it. It was just the one time."

"Do it? Wha...?"

"He'll know, he'll know. Promise me you will."

"Lady I'm going to hell. Won't ya see Henry?"

"Harold!"

"Won't ya see Harold in heaven?"

"No, he'll be in hell. You must remember, Harold Reese! Harold Reese!"

Reality grips the man. He finds the strength to sit up for a moment and gasps. "Oh god! I'm going to hell! Shit! I'm only nineteen! Lady, get me an ambulance! Get me a freakin' priest!"

The lady looks numbly at him and is silent. The man loses his spark of strength, his eyes glimmer only faintly and he falls back against the newspaper box. Her tears start to fall. Again, she shakes him violently.

"No! No ambulance! No priest! You're going! You have to go! Damn you! Remember Harold Reese! Harold Reese!"

The faint sparkle in the man's eyes flickers like a tiny flame in the wind. The icy air kicks up and howls as a frigid gust slices through the two of them. A final blink, his eyes hang open and the color is a dull gray like the slush in the streets. She continues to shake him and screams, "Harold Reese! Damn you! Remember Harold Reese!"



“Me”

*Silver Gelatin Print*

*Nicole Macaluso*

## Pictures

*Ira Claxton*

When you have once more gone  
I cling to memories and turn  
To colored syllables of recorded time.  
Here is one of you  
Waking to the morn  
The soft smile of some forgotten dream  
Lingers on the fullness of your lips.  
There! the flash of emerald,  
Your mother's eyes  
In eyelids that droop like mine.  
I tell you they are sensual  
You laugh not knowing yet  
How the word denotes you;  
How in years to come  
Others will linger holding hands  
Now bitten to the quick.  
And in your tussled curls  
Find respite from the world

## Closure

Steven A. Acunto

I remember clearly that as soon as I was old enough and able to speak, my mother and I were arguing. We both held strong convictions and a tendency to pursue each other aggressively with our points of view. Lucky for my father, he worked double shifts as a taxi cab driver in New York City. I can palpably feel, in retrospect, how a year seemed like an eternity and tomorrow was too long to wait for. These were how my teenage years felt to me, and I can well imagine to my parents. Many years of layered miscommunication and an inability to relate left us both with an emptiness, a diseased part of our souls that yearned for resolution; one which only I could provide for her and only she could provide for me.

My relationship to my mother was a strange dynamic. There was no question how much we loved each other, yet we didn't like one another very much. I even remember during one of my teenage frustrations I said to her, "you know, if we weren't related, we would not be friends." Nonetheless, there was a palpable love between us, as well as a massive tug of will, which was obvious to all who found themselves sharing company with us for more than twenty minutes. It is a hard dynamic to understand, one of which I attribute in retrospect to being the spiritual connection specific to the mother-child relationship; one that no disagreement, level of frustration or time can deteriorate. As I grew older, our disagreements turned into loud belligerent arguments, wounds deepened, scars from wounds I never even knew she had were medicated by the way she expressed herself

condescendingly. Keep in mind that I was no angel either, I had deep seated emotional repressions that caused me to exhibit the very responsive behaviors that would keep our eternal tug of war alive and well.

In High School, I cut the first two weeks of my sophomore year, and when I did attend, I was every teacher's nightmare. I experimented with drugs and attempted to runaway on more than one occasion. Reflecting back, I understand that it was my way of saying: "Hey, I'm not like any of you! I'm in pain for which I have no medicine, and yet I can't describe it without fear of further emotional degradation, so for now, you will deal with me on my own terms!"

Of course, I was still an adolescent, subject to parental legislature and the court of mother and father found me guilty of being young and wasting my youth.

When I was grounded, so was my mother. As a housewife that couldn't drive, if I was home grounded, guess who her

company was? Strangely enough, we found ourselves playing Chinese checkers or watching TV together. My mother would make sure to remind me of my bad behavior and what I was going to turn into as an adult. She would do this at least one-third of our time together during those dysfunctional family moments that I held so dear. But honestly, I really loved that time with her, and she loved that time with me, though neither of us would admit it.

When I turned 18 and had become legally an adult, I set my repressions free; a weight that had felt like silver running through my veins had finally found its release through the words that were formed in my mouth. Those words described my truth that

"When I turned 18 and had become legally an adult, I set my repressions free. . ."

I was a homosexual and was not given a choice to feel this way or not, nor was it a decision I had the liberty to make but a reality I had to face if I was ever going to live a happy fulfilled life. To my surprise, my father grieved for two weeks and then warmed up to me in supportive ways I could have never in my wildest imaginations anticipated; however, my mother made the situation about her, that she had some role to play and was not as accepting, understanding or very kind in the beginning.

On the Mother's Day prior to the onset of her illness, my cousin and I went to my mother's home to celebrate the day. I was looking forward to it and made all the preparations. I bought a card, which took forever to find. My mother didn't fit the typical sweet, loving, supportive mother stereotype as most of these cards depicted, so I found one that simply stated on the inside: "It is because you are special, that I love you so much." Beyond the prefabricated sentiments written inside the card by Hallmark, I always wrote a message from the heart of what I was feeling. In this case, it was gratitude for having given me the gift of life, gratitude that I have the ability to face challenges and conquer them, gratitude that I have the chance to fantasize about falling in love, gratitude that I have the ability to appreciate all kinds of people from all backgrounds and status levels, and most importantly gratitude that I have the opportunity to say how happy I am to be alive and thank her for making it possible. So as my cousin, my mother and myself were sitting around the kitchen table, my cousin noticed a Chap Stick lying there, which belonged to me. She asked, "Who's Chap Stick is this?"

To which my mother replied, "It's not

mine, *I'm not going to die of AIDS.*" As the sounds of these words vibrated in my ears, I felt my heart swell and detract, my extremities tremble as if looking for a vent, some open space that could possibly release the intensity of the pain, hurt and rage that this comment had made me feel. Blinded by hurt and anger, I reached for the card, ripped it up, threw it in her face, and exclaimed how unfit of a mother and unworthy of my love she was to say such atrocities on a day that I was so excited to celebrate my love for her. I ran up the stairs to give my father a kiss goodbye, not even able to repeat to him why I was leaving, but I would talk to him soon.

On my travel back to New York City, I decided that I would no longer subject myself to any further emotional harm from her, 22 years old by this point, and I felt I had

paid my dues. Any further communication would be counterproductive to my emotional and mental well being, so I concluded that it would not be good to continue a relationship with someone who may love me but doesn't know how to. The rest of my family would either understand or not, but I had made up my mind.

Almost a year had gone by when I would not speak to or have anything to do with my mother. My father, cousins, and family members tried to find ways to justify or rearrange the words that she said on that day which had affected me so deeply. Every attempt they would make at trying to legitimize what she had said to me only served as a method by which the knife cut me deeper only at a different angle. "How many ways can you interpret a statement such as the one that she had made to me on Mother's Day? *It's not mine, I'm not going to die of AIDS.*"

*"It's not mine. I'm not going to die of AIDS."*

I received a phone call from my Cousin Denise. She told me that she was going to pick me up because we had to rush to the hospital. My mother was on a respirator for reasons that were unclear, and I felt no hesitation but rather an urgency to rush to her side. It was in that moment that I realized my anger and pent up resentment was not only for the comment that she made on Mother's Day; it was the vehicle by which I could blame her for never seeing past the façade and into the real me.

On the long drive to the hospital, I stared with my face pushed against the cold window aimlessly up and to the right at the setting sun, which painted pink swirls on the bottoms of the clouds that hovered above the New Jersey Turnpike. Lost in my thoughts of my childhood, I began to go through the process of introspection. Now armed with the mind of the accomplished responsible adult I had become, against not only my mother's, but so many other predictions of those who based there impressions of me by the actions I exhibited in my younger years.

It became evident that my mother had a very rare disease, which only shows its deviant face in the sixth decade of life. On top of this, she was in mid-stage emphysema and her lungs were rapidly losing their ability to take oxygen from the air and circulate it into her bloodstream.

For the first few months, I stayed with my mother as often as I could without putting my income at risk. I spent two weekends with her. I cleaned, waited on, cuddled with, helped her to the bathroom, dressed and bathed her as necessary. As her disease progressed, she became less and less able to ambulate. The very act of walking from the kitchen to the bathroom could cause her to lose her breath with the equivalence of a marathon runner who just finished first place.

My mother began to realize that it is not who you are but rather what you do that measures the value of a human beings worth. We would take turns watching my mother, when my father or I had to work. On one

occasion, I was unable to be there, and due to the fact that my mother had an ability to overreact and that she had been in the same condition for so long, we felt that she could be alone for just one day. We knew that everything she needed was within arms distance as we had redesigned the living space to make it so. It was on this day that my boyfriend called me to let me know he was on his way to my mother's house, apparently she had called him crying that she was scared, didn't want to be alone and to please come. He went to be by her side without hesitation. My mother took a very strong liking to my partner at the time and he loved her as well. Although my mother never verbalized having come to terms with my lifestyle, she expressed her mental evolution through her actions and interactions with my partner and me. She had learned about love; that love would accept her even if she would not accept it, and finally she let go and embraced it.

Then the day came when I received a phone call from my mother. It was strange, eerie, not like any other call, but absolute in its certainty and profound beyond explanation of any expression ever exerted from her character. "Steven," she said in a soft raspy murmur.

"Yeah , Mom, what's going on?"

"I'm going to the hospital, and I don't think I'm going to last very long."

In my attempt to downplay her concern as well as my own I replied, "Oh, you're going to last a million years. What are you talking about?" I said, "Your not going to die until you've driven me crazy first, and you haven't accomplished that yet!"

She made no audible gesture to my reply and reiterated her desire. With what breath she could muster she asked, "Steven, please come as soon as you can, I want to see you, please?"

When I got to the hospital, my father was sitting to the right of the bed at an angle facing towards me diagonally. I went up to my mother who was panting and heavily out

of breath. I smoothed her hair back from her face wet with perspiration and kissed her forehead before retracing my steps backward into the chair positioned opposite to the one my father was using.

"Steven," she said as she started to cry, "I know you think I never loved you, but I always loved you very much. I never knew how to be a mother because my mother was never one for me. I was too old to have you when I did and never expected that I would have a child, but I always loved you."

I stopped her for I had already forgiven her for my anger and replied, "I know that you always loved me, and I harbor no anger or resentment towards you. You did the best you could with what you knew and that is all we can do as human beings. We are all doing the best we can with what we have."

In those ten minutes, 27 years of anger, resentment, confusion, sadness and longing were dissolved with our truths expressed blatantly. In the last moments possible, everything that needed to be said was, and the most exuberant essence of love was everywhere. There was this incredible sense of joy in its purest form, which permeated the room even though the tragic circumstances, played catalyst to its manifestation. I kissed my mother goodbye, giving her the gift of my forgiveness, which she already had, and from her, I received the blessing of her acknowledgement of my years of pain and longing, to hear her say the words "I love you" to me one last time, which brought us the greatest gift at this end of an era in both of our lives. Closure.



“Running through my veins”

*Silver Gelatin Print*

Ying Huang

# My Favorite Sound

*Carlos Hermida*

There is a good part  
And a bad part  
To a fart  
It's easy to tell  
That the bad part is the smell  
But the good part to me  
As it very well should be  
Is the sound

Who knew that passing gas  
Could make such a great sound  
It has the power to make you laugh  
Possibly make you frown  
Bring on loud cheers  
In some cases tears  
This sound many people fear  
They hear one and they think they're doomed  
This tune can even clear whole rooms

Such a well-known sound  
It's world-renowned  
From China to your town  
This sound can be found

Such a beautiful sound  
Some sound like a tear  
Some like a squeaky chair  
Some like a bear  
SOME ARE LOUD!!!!  
Some don't sound  
Some drag on and on  
Some are just a little too long  
Some are short  
They sound like little squirts  
Some are so high pitched  
They sound like they hurt  
Some are so low  
That they sneak by and you never know

So have no fear  
When you hear this sound  
And when you fart  
Be proud and say this loud  
Something has parted  
And I have farted  
And it's a beautiful sound!!!!

## Lucky Charms

*Aisha McDonald*

“Give me the damn cigarettes.” Lee shifted side to side as he tapped his hand on the counter.

Unmindful of his agitation Risa took a sip of her Blue Mountain coffee. Opening the cupboard, she withdrew a box of Lucky Charms.

“Give me the green bowl,” she ordered.

“No! Not unless you give me back my cigarettes.”

Risa raised an eyebrow. “Are you seriously holding my cereal bowl hostage?”

“Damn it, Risa,” his voice rose, “give me back my stuff.”

“Give me the bowl, now.”

He ran his hand through his disheveled hair. She could tell he was getting even more worked up, but she refused to give in and let him have his way. If it weren’t for her, he wouldn’t follow any of the doctor’s orders. That had been the reason he had relapsed the last time and Risa had nearly gone sick with worry. The doctor had given him strict orders this time and Risa was making sure he adhered to them.

“If you don’t give them to me, I’ll...I’ll break the bowl.” He raised the bowl above his head in a threatening motion. “Don’t test me.”

She took another sip of the lukewarm coffee. “It’s a plastic bowl, you idiot.”



“Carla by Carla”      Drawing

*Carla Schuchman*

# No Duck

*Jenna Holland*

I am no duck. I am swan.  
Fat girl, slim inside  
Laugh and point, make me cry.  
I take the bus, pretty girls get rides.  
Too fat for a dress, no date for the prom,  
Can't fit in the rides at the fair,  
Not even comfortable in my own skin,  
I eat to try and fill the chasm within.  
Fat girl, slim inside  
Big-boned, pleasantly plump,  
I am a whale beached by the tide.  
Exercise, I am told, will uplift my soul.  
Eating right will set me free.  
People, they tell me, I have a great face,  
They mean to say my body could be replaced.  
Fat girl, slim inside  
I am Phoenix, I will rise.  
Skinny for now I don't have to hide.

# Turned 21 Friday

*Mary A. Simon*

I roll out of bed sometime near one  
My mind still thinkin of Fun  
The tunes run over in my head  
My body tellin me to climb back in bed  
My mind full of confusion half wasted half stoned  
The ringin in my head sounds like the telephone  
I reach out to answer it but no one is there  
I now realize what I've done  
I know who was here

I walk to the kitchen breakfast is waiting for me  
A box of Lucky Charms and a pot of cold coffee  
I clear off the counter and try to hop up  
But the walls just keep spinnin  
I think I threw up  
I leave everything alone and I go back to bed  
I curl into a ball feeling most dead

I dream of a night very far away  
A wild night when we laughed and played

I finally come to in a dazed state  
The walls have stopped spinnin  
I realize how late  
The tunes are silent  
No one has called  
But still I feel lost  
Still I feel wrong

I roll out of bed sometime near one  
My mind still thinkin of Friday night's fun  
I walk to the kitchen breakfast is waiting for me  
A box of Lucky Charms and a pot of cold coffee.

# My First Poem in English

*Kim Nguyen*

My teacher said  
“You have a natural talent  
Express feeling.”

I, phobic child  
Wore gray hair,  
Doubt and fear.  
Began playing  
A talent gift.

Fifty-year-old student  
Side by side  
Young teen classmates  
Learn to read poetry  
In another language  
Wondering  
Who's the stranger?

From somewhere,  
The first assignment:  
Write a poem  
Feel it true  
Light up a lyric room  
Push a rock up a mountain  
Upward  
Hands free  
Head smiles.

Face down in the water  
Longing not to drown  
At anchor  
Dare to trust.

Already there, a poem  
Within me  
Crystal bubbles rise  
Nothing more  
Only the sound of water clapping...



“Bonzai”      *Digital Art*

*Grant Abraham*

This is my first poem in English.

# Time

Erin Mandelik

"Four more miles, Christine," I tell her, my eyes flashing between the barren stretch of highway ahead and my partner's grimacing face. She nods, but is too preoccupied with pain to offer any words. I'm shaking as I drive the car, paying little mind to the fact that I'm pushing this F-ing piece of crap rental at the limits of its speedometer range.

We were over forty miles from the nearest hospital when my former partner, whom I have been in love with for far too long, took a bullet in pursuit of a suspect. I immediately called for EMS help, only to be informed that the Life Flight services were unavailable – tied up with a five-car pile up in the far north end of the county. We'd have to wait for a ground ambulance to leave the hospital. No way would she make it! She'd taken the bullet in the chest and was bleeding like crazy. I had to get her help fast. So I made the decision to drive her myself, while our current partners kept pursuing the suspect. Christine agreed with me. She was scared and that really scared the crap out of me.

She's not doing well at all. Her face is ghostly white. Beads of sweat glisten on her forehead. Her breathing is quick and shallow. Despite the pressure she's holding on the wound, the blood continues to flow freely, soaking her blouse, staining it a horrible crimson. The first thirty miles or so of the trip, she kept up with the conversation; the constant chatter I hounded her with to reassure myself she was doing fine. But the last few miles, she's grown quiet and seems to be losing control, less able to concentrate on what I'm saying to her.

And when her eyes flutter shut I panic. "Chris!!!" They flicker back open almost immediately, but I hold my breath as she tries to focus on me and until I hear her voice again.

"Yeah."

"You gotta stay with me, Chris. Don't close your eyes."

The reply she manages is barely above a whisper. "I'm trying – getting tired though."

Jesus, she is so pale. What the Fuck good is a car that can only do eighty? "I know. We're almost there. You're doing great. You've made it all this way. It's not much further. Just hang in there."

"I...can't." She's starting to fade again.

"God Damn it! Yes, you can!" I hate yelling at her, but I'll do anything I have to do to keep her alive. I'm torn between the race to get Christine to the hospital before she bleeds to death and the overwhelming need to stop everything and hold her in my arms.

"Kk-kevin, I..." As she reaches out to me across the console, I grab her hand and squeeze it firmly. Her slight grip confirms what I already know. She doesn't have much time.

Another mile marker!

"Three miles, Christine! The exit's only three miles ahead! We'll be there before you know it," I say trying to get her to stick with me.

What she said next made me want to cry, "Hold...me!" She chokes out the request, fighting now for each breath she takes.

"Chr-is!" My voice cracks, as I can no longer hold back the tears. "I have to drive, honey. God, I wish I could hold you...but I have to drive the damn car."

"Stop the car, Kevin.... Hold me a little while," she says looking at me. And only then do I see her eyes go from a beautiful light brown almost hazel to a chilling gray. Death is looking back at me. She's giving up. She never gives up! My heart's pounding, racing faster than this pathetic four cylinder engine, ready to explode from overload of adrenaline coursing through my veins. I can't let her go. She's all I have in this world. I wouldn't be able to function without her in my life. I wouldn't want to try or even live anymore.

We pass another mile marker and I'm already straining my eyes to see far ahead for the next one. "Only two more miles now." I'm shaking so bad, it's no wonder I can even

drive. "Are you listening to me? We're almost there."

She opens her mouth, moistens her lips and swallows hard before she speaks to me. "Not gonna make it, partner. Pulse...weak. Too much bleeding...internal! Please hold me."

I hate to refuse her, but I'm not about to pull this car over and watch her die in my arms. I can't do that. I can't! "No! I'm not giving up. And you're not either. Fight, Christine! Do you hear me? You have to fight!"

She coughs. "C...cold." She's going into shock. She coughs again and dark red trickles from the corner of her mouth.

We're finally hitting some traffic as we approach the small town, and I nearly collide into an SUV and have to swerve around another crappy sedan before I can turn my attention back to my partner. Never once did I let go of her hand. Needing that connection, holding on to her life. Refusing to let her slip away from me. "You're going to be okay, Chris," I say it with certainty. If I could only convince myself of that lie!

In my mind, I know it's a miracle and a credit to this woman's amazing inner strength that she isn't going to survive – even if I get her to the hospital alive. But my heart defiantly rejects the facts of the matter. If my will alone can save her, I have no reason to be afraid. I'm not going to give up. Never! Not on Christine. She tries to speak again, but there are no words, just another gush of blood. And this time there is so much more.

I try not to let my fear show. I should stop. I should hold her. She's not going to make it. I know that, but I can't bring myself to let her go. "Hospital, one mile!" I read the sign aloud as we speed past the sign.

She chokes and sputters, battling to fill her damaged lungs with air. Drowning in her own blood, suffocating...dying right in front of my eyes. The frail grip of her left hand relaxes in mine and her right drops away from the wound.

My stomach jumps in my throat.

"Don't leave me, Christine! Christine?" I shake her arm. Nothing. "Chris?" She's unresponsive. I'm suddenly cold in this roasting car and my insides turn to ice. "God! No, Please! Please, don't die." I send this car careening off the exit ramp, praying that the hospital isn't much further.

It's there. Just up ahead. I can just barely make out the sign through my tear-blurred vision. And as I swerve through traffic, I rattle non-stop. As long as I'm talking to her, as long as the conversation doesn't end...she's still here with me. "Okay, honey, it's okay. I can see the ER from here. You're going to be all right. Christine, do you hear me? Please hear me. I need you, Christine. I...I love you. I need you to know that. I love you more than I've ever loved anyone. Don't leave me. Please don't leave me alone."

I have never told her my true feelings, in the seven years that we had worked together. But if she does die, I want her to know what is in my heart. I keep right on talking to her as if my words alone can keep her alive. When I run a red light and swerve around a mini van, her body slumps forward and I struggle to right her, ignoring the fear clutching at my heart – the fact that she's already dead, that it's too late.

The car screeches into the hospital parking lot, and I don't hit the brakes until we're in front of the emergency room doors. In a heartbeat, I'm out of the car and I have Christine in my arms. She's unconscious. I don't think she's breathing anymore. Not dead. Never dead! Chris can't die. My legs are numb as I run through the entrance screaming for someone to help us...to help her...to save her so that I can live again too.

"My partner's been shot! I'm a Federal Agent! Someone please help her!"

Medical personnel descend upon us, pulling Christine out of my arms, asking questions, and trying to get me to submit to an exam as well. "I'm fine, God Damn it! Just take care of HER!"

"We are, sir. The trauma team has her,"

a nurse with the most calming voice says as she places a hand over my cold trembling ones. "Are you injured?" She tries to ask again.

"What? No." Looking down at myself for the first time since the shooting, I'm sickened by what I see. Christine's blood! I look like I've taken a bath in the stuff. If I had any hope left, now it's gone. How could she possibly survive after losing so much? I've lost her. I know it now. "Oh, God! Oh, God!" is all that I can say. "It's not mine! It's not my blood!" If only it were.

I'd give anything to have been the one to take the bullet, for it to be my blood spilling out everywhere. Mine instead of Christine's. I should have stopped and held her and not be such a selfish bastard.

"Easy," the nurse tells me. "We'll get you into some clean clothes. I'm going to need you to answer a few questions and fill out some papers for the admitting. But that can wait until you've calmed down."

"No!" I pull away from her. "I want to see Christine. Where is she?"

And that same calm voice speaks up. "Your partner's being treated. She's in good hands."

"I want to be with her. Take me to her!" I scream again.

"Sir, I'm sorry, I can't do that. You'd be in the way back there." Bless her heart, she tries to calm me.

Ignoring her warning, I race through the triage area, shoving my way through the double doors and back into the open waiting room I started out in. The double doors to the ER are see-through near the top of the door so I could still see in.

The curtains are pulled open in the first trauma room and there's a blur of activity as a team of doctors and nurses work around a patient. "Clear!" One of them shouts and they all move back from the center, just enough that I catch a glimpse of Christine's pale lifeless body that they're fighting to revive. And that's it for me. My legs give out and I collapse to the floor.

And everything goes black.

I wake up in a cold sweat. It's been seven months since it happened, and I have those same nightmares to look forward to every time I shut my eyes. Over and over, I drive those final miles, watching Christine dying right next to me in that car. When will these nightmares end? When will I be able to put this behind and forget? I try and try, but then suddenly...

She's there. Alive! Just like she's been there every night since I brought her home from the hospital. Wrapping her strong but delicate arms around me, comforting me with her touch, making my whole world right again. Christine! My life! My perfect other! Right here in my bed, holding me close and kissing away my tears.

*Fin.*



“Homesick”

Colored Pencil Drawing

Isabelle Thiony

## For My Soldier

*Christina Perry*

I pray for peace and freedom.  
I pray for victory.  
But most of all I pray to God  
To bring you back to me.

You need not be a hero.  
You need not win great fame.  
And even if your body is hurt,  
I'll love you just the same.

So now I close my eyes and pray,  
While down my face tears creep.  
If God can not bring you back alive  
Then let me stay asleep.

# Returning

*Ira Claxton*

Softer and more silent than the tide,  
He rose to meet her at her coming home.  
With his arms made an envelope,  
She scarce could breathe  
A kiss of welcome to his cheek,  
Nor bare the heart to tell him of his loss.  
So she spoke of past time,  
Of childhood memories, buried deep  
Within the psyche of his being,  
Blushing girlish when he smiled at her.  
In the lost afternoons of memory,  
She danced in tune with all the pleasures of his mind;  
The soft walks on beaches too beautiful for footprints;  
With waves, like late summer breezes,  
Gently erasing the shadows of their feet.  
He bent to kiss her, startling off her dreams,  
And was amazed to see  
The breaking conscience of her eyes.  
She moved her hands to fight away the tears,  
As he, perplexed, in awkward silence stood  
Watching the vast stream;  
Wondering what they were and how they came,  
Until, at last, she whispered out the words,  
How she had sought another's arms  
When she was there,  
And could not now go on.  
He took her hands, that trembled so,  
To stop her from the door;  
As through the pain, the words he spoke,  
Fell warmly on her fear.  
“You know, I loved you from the day we met.”  
She looked at him in awe.  
There was no anger in his voice,  
Or in his tortured eyes,  
So was said the lines that stand  
Forever in her life.  
“The deed you've done is awful, yes,  
It breaks my heart within,  
But the love that flows, is great enough  
To cover all your sin.”



“Skyline”

Color Photography

Leah DiNucci

# You

*Sophia Gray*

You, yes you who hides your face from mine,  
Pretend not to see me with my palm extended  
For the alms you grudgingly hand down  
Stripped of my dignity; pitied, scorned ridiculed.  
Frowned upon by you who have commissioned my  
Shame with your unjust demands for success;  
Confident in my failure when you know drive-bys  
And crack wrest my only opportunity. You dare  
hide behind windows of BMW's, Benz', Lexus'  
like you did when poignant eyes mirror Emptiness  
On plasma screen misery echoes "Thirty-four cents,  
Enough to make a dollar!" But silent conscience  
and deaf ears, Answered painful plea. You are  
merciless! Your heart is made of stone like rocks  
that adorn your callous Soul. How dare you be  
indifferent to disfigured children in Sierra Leone!  
You are cold! Like dead animals bereft of skin  
to provide needless Warmth. You may refuse to  
acknowledge my presence but here's where I remain  
Until shallow grave welcomes my tired bones;  
until then, society 'You' will not be rid of me.



“Where is my mind?”

Color Pencils

Maria Paola Gonzalez

# Grandma's Gravy

*Maria Matienzo*

Freshly chopped garlic simmers at the bottom of her All-Clad gravy pot  
lightly coated in olive oil.

The garlic scented smoke  
invites in sun-ripened tomatoes  
hand crushed to perfection  
followed by  
Contadina tomato paste.

She adds a sprinkle of basil,  
touch of salt,  
shake of oregano,  
slowly circling the red stained wooden spoon  
around the pot  
dropping in hot sausages and meatballs.

The red oily sauce bubbles  
over the edge of the pot  
dripping steadily down the side,  
and while no one is watching,  
I slip a piece of warm Italian loaf  
into the thick red sea  
and steal a taste of  
Grandma's gravy.



“Oceanic Interlude”

*Pastel Drawing*

Carla Schuchman



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“Alter Ego”

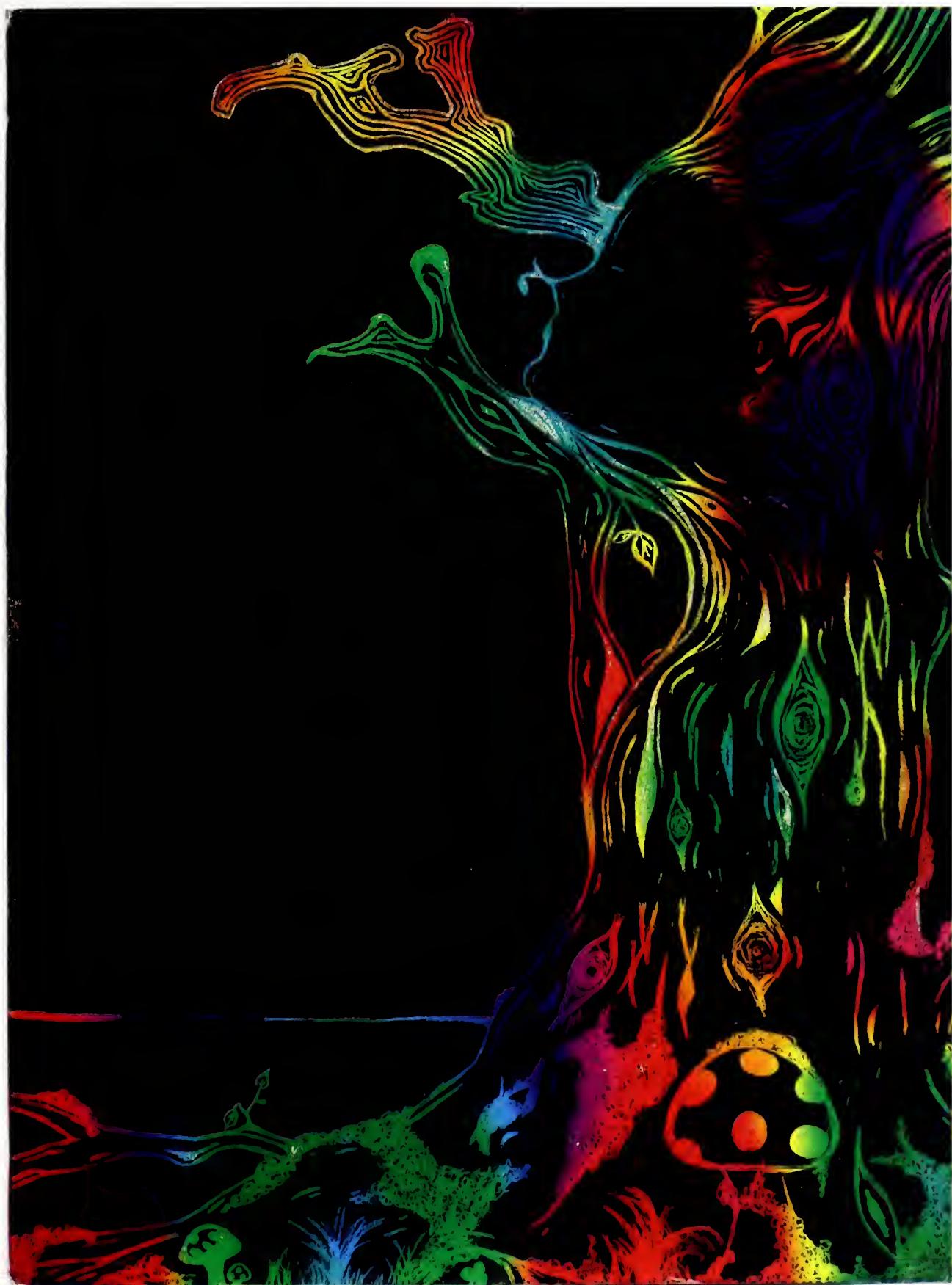
*Acrylic Painting*



# Melting

*Rebecca Faust*

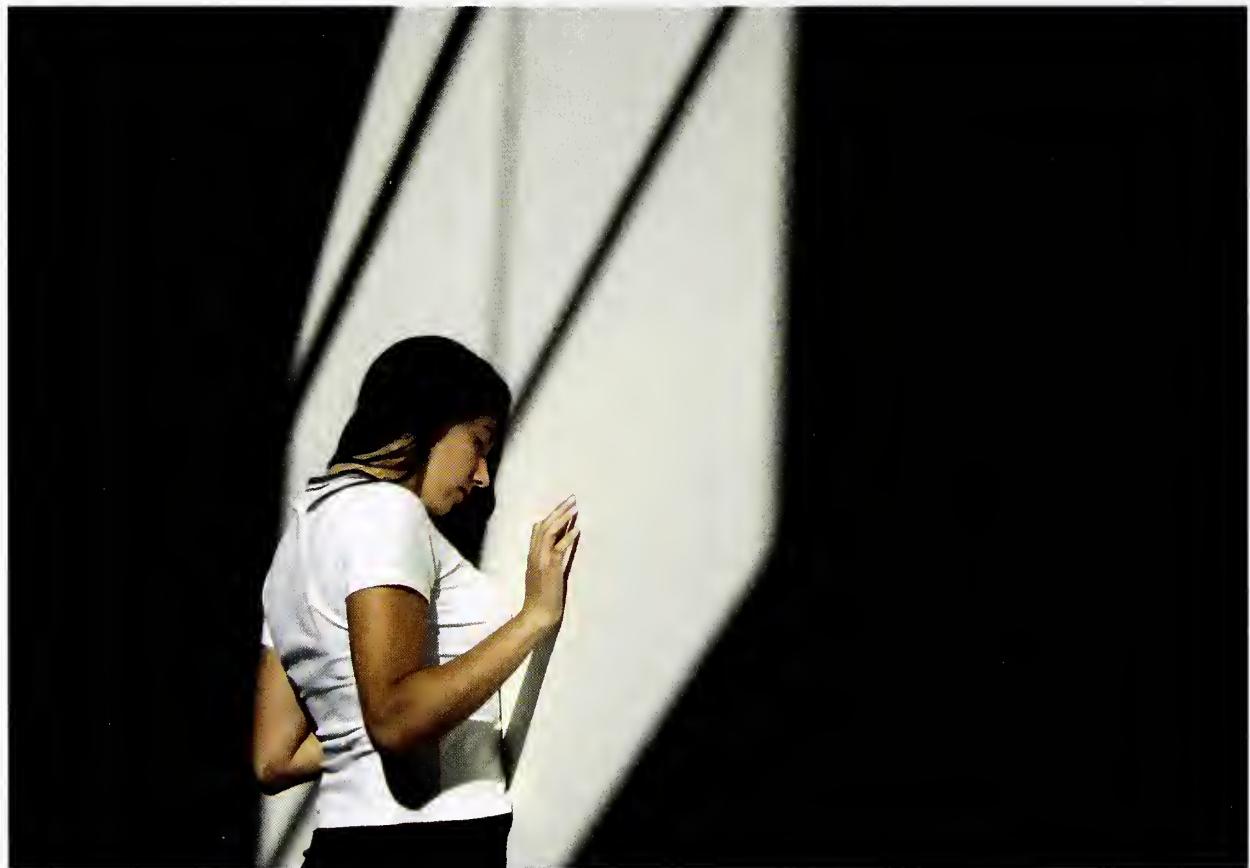
Do I seem like  
I have no feelings?  
The ultimate  
ice maiden.  
I wish you could  
see inside  
closed doors.  
Why won't you  
help me-  
hate me-  
hold me-  
just stop talking.  
Whisper to me  
your classified  
information.  
Are you afraid  
of me now?  
Do you wish  
for your innocence  
concerning  
my emotions?  
Understand that  
even ice maidens  
melt  
drip.



"Spirit"

Etching

Isabelle Thony



“Window in the Darkness”

*Color Photography*

*Adriana Uribe*

# Grief

*Wanda DeLeon*

Profoundly anguished soul,  
Riddled with pain.  
Blue-black colored flesh  
The last time I saw your face.

Tear-worn and grief stricken eyes  
As clear and as blue as the sky in the end,  
Closed now in a long dreamless sleep.

Lips touch swollen cheeks,  
Stubble rough against soft skin.

Gently whispered goodbye on the quiet breath.

Dark stained cherry  
Soon wrested you from view.

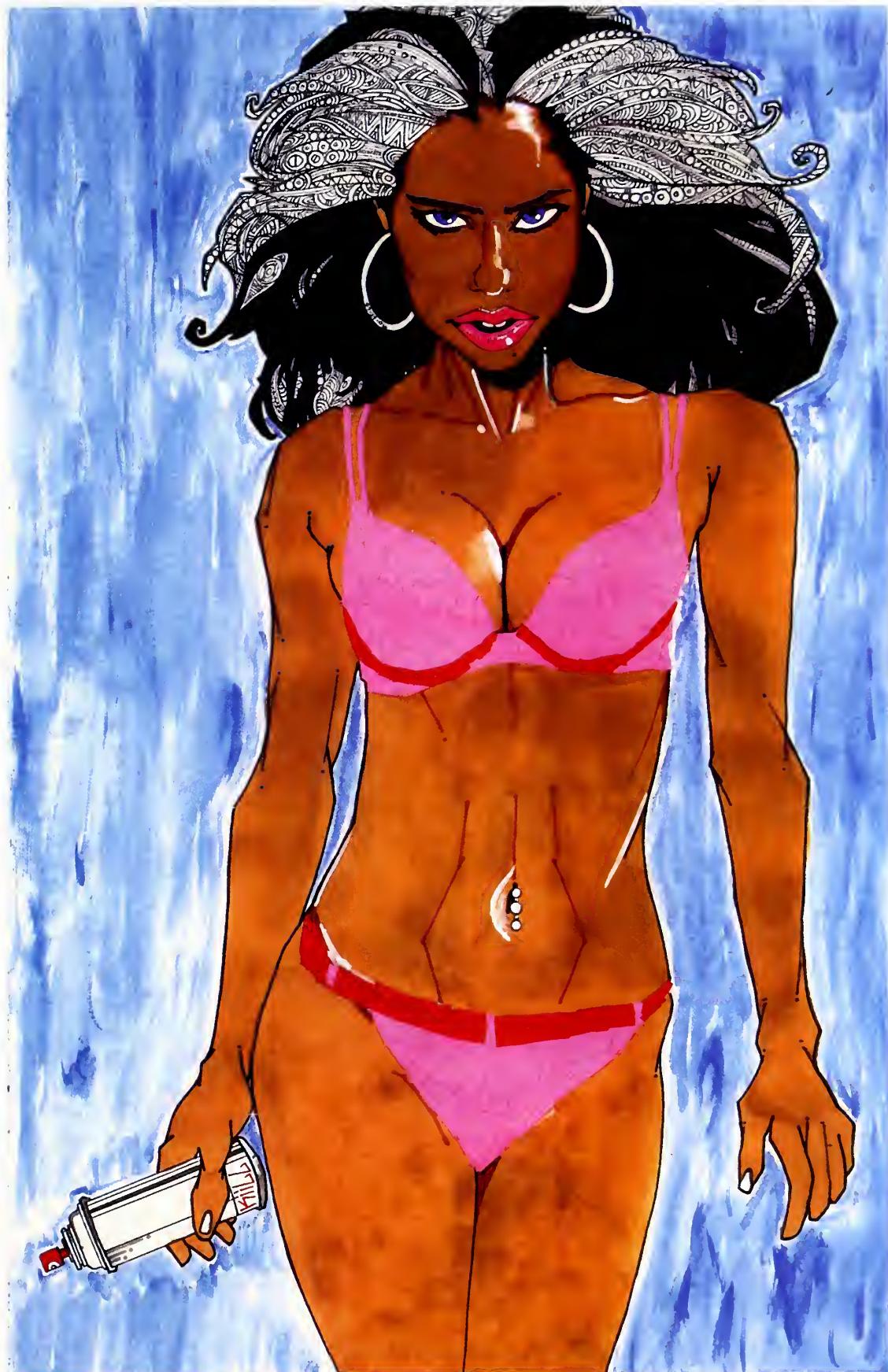
Silent sighs of relief,  
Shaky breath freed  
From where it was waiting.

Stormy grey eyes red and burning  
With tears unable to fall.  
Body too exhausted to breathe, to function at all.  
Sorrow so overwhelming, I don't want to be.

# \$50 Fantasy

*Jennifer Miranda*

Lights come on;  
men surround me  
waving old presidents in the air.  
I take a deep breath  
transforming myself into the woman  
you secretly fantasize about  
when your mind retires at night.  
My appearance is one of a movie star.  
I'm your star tonight,  
and while you think you're controlling me  
with your precious greens;  
I'm controlling every thought and muscle in your body.  
As your heart drums faster  
my body dips downward slowly.  
I crawl closer to you  
with a hungry, desirable look  
upon my made-up face.  
The light illuminates the golden sequins I wear;  
Your face displays streams of sweat  
Are you nervous?  
The crowd gets silent and watches  
to see who I choose as tonight's prey.  
My soft voluptuous curls spring into position  
and I smile devilishly  
I crouch down to your eye level  
and run my fingers through your wet thin hair.  
A business man; this could be a challenge.  
I take your tie in my soft hands  
bringing you close enough that we inhale each other's breaths.  
Can you see beyond my Mabelline exterior?  
Can you see my world instead of your fantasies?  
Of course not; you're not thinking with your head right now.  
I thrust back and graciously rise.  
A wink ends you my finale.  
Velvet curtains fall behind me  
while a roar of whistles suddenly conquers the silence.  
Your breath has been taken away again.  
I'm struggling to breathe through life.



“Latina”

Mixed Media on Paper

Kapone is Ill



“The Gift”

*Color Photography*

Wanda Deleon

# How Are You?

*Sinem Vzundemir*

I left a letter on your window.  
What it said was very insignificant but  
If you read into those three words,  
You couldn't imagine all the poetry that went into it:

The scale of the paper, five inches no bigger.  
The graceful lines on the paper, Like a ladder.  
The scared characteristics of my letters,  
hidden inside.  
The ink of my pen drenched in my hearts art,  
smeared in between the lines.

The fold, the placement,  
My heart, on the pavement.

I left a letter at your window.  
What it said was very insignificant but  
you only read the surface of those three words.  
All the poetry was washed away by your careless eyes.  
I provided you with a ladder,  
my heart was given to you in a letter,  
Marked, "return to sender."

# A Joint Effort

Andrew Bond

The rain came heavy. Sheets covered the car and the dreary feeling of a spoiled evening flooded in. Four beers rolled around on the floor, making contact with familiar sound. Another twelve rested cold and in their home between my feet. I stared out the window, through the water, and pondered the night. Before I knew, it Dan was turning into the studio and the time to prepare was upon us.

Despite the unfavorable weather, people were gathered outside, inside, and all around. Dan and I stepped out of the car and the rain ceased as if on purpose. The hopeful feeling of an amazing shined through. I took two steps before being greeted with hugs from the coolest bass player in the house, Rich O'Toole. "You ready?" he asked.

"I'm alive for this."

I passed a beer each to Dan and Rich and grabbed one for myself. The nectar filled our bodies with warmth and confidence. We killed one, and then another, and Dan brought the rest to the house fridge. Rich went to flirt with his girlfriend.

I stood alone in the parking lot, nearly drunk, and fully energized. From the corner of my eye, Bob Dolder materialized like a vampire. He was pale, and skinny, with hair down to his shoulders. He was a genuine character whose hair was long because he hadn't cut it, not because it was cool. "When do you go on?" he asked.

"Five minutes."

"Come to my truck."

I followed Bob to his black pick-up in the parking lot and got inside. He opened the middle compartment and pulled out a velvety pouch. From it, emerged a dark glass pipe with two red horns protruding from the bowl. A rich, piney smell filled the cab. "Meet the Devil. It's always a good time," said Bob.

Moments later, I stepped out of that black pick up. A light cloud billowed out behind me. Bob wished me luck and said to look for him inside. I was dazed, but focused. Nervousness began to take over as my main feeling with countless others noticeable. The numerous intoxicants caught up with me and from then on everything happened in vignettes. Time meant nothing now.

"Come on man. We must load the shit in."

It was Dan, walking beside me with haste. We walked around back where our instruments were. A sort of alley was formed by two rows of buildings and an array of puddles. The entire narrow space was filled with palpable nerves and excitement. A calming agent was passed around. I was beginning to need to concentrate on walking.

Through the door, I could hear muffled instruments clanging together. They kept time but offered nothing original. "This is our last song, guys. Make sure you check out our merch table and vote for us. We need the money." I heard the voice of the act my band was to follow and thought of a salesman rather than a musician. But it was our turn soon. I turned to my crew. "Let's go in there and revolutionize."

I opened the door. The fact that I was performing my music for the people inside hit me at that moment. I began to shake and wobble. None of them had ever heard my heart and soul before. It was the ultimate personal experience. I walked through the crowd and onto the stage. After brief tuning and technical adjusting, it was time. Rich approached the mic. "This is a joint effort."

At that moment, the lights were cut. I couldn't see the audience. It was my world for the next half hour. Dan struck the hi-hat and we launched into song. The notes floated throughout the building and people came to hear them better. After one tune, they were all still there and committed to staying. I got lost in time.

I opened my eyes at the end of our set. People were standing and cheering. I turned my back to them and a smile stretched from ear to ear across my face. This was happiness, if it could ever be described or understood. I walked off the stage and through the people, accepting hugs and handshakes. I realized my future.

Back at home, I gathered with friends. We shared beer and laughs. We watched a video recording of the show we just played. I couldn't believe it was me. I had no recollection of dancing like a mad man to the rhythm of rock and roll. Dan took me aside. "I'm serious. You are the next Hendrix. Let's take this thing all the way."

I am invincible.



“Warrior Within”

*Silver Gelatin Print*

Stephen Smith

# Walker is taking me home

*J. Charnin*

I woke up on Dave's living room floor again  
I know he says it's okay but I'm sure his girl is thinking differently  
I killed the bottle last night which means this morning  
I killed any chances of a future for you and me  
I can't go home because your dirty clothes still line our bedroom floor  
The rent's past due but I don't seem to care anymore  
You didn't leave a note or say a thing to me  
I guess I can understand I wasn't around for you  
You still could have come and visited me when I was in my cage  
I'm sure the thought was more than enough to keep you away  
It's probably best you didn't tell me then anyway  
But somehow I know why you're gone but it's better to pretend  
I've looked far and wide but you're never to be found at our local liquor store  
I checked the pool hall and you're not at the bar  
I called your mom she says the same thing every time  
You were just tired and just walked away from everything  
I can't go home because your dirty clothes still line our bedroom floor  
Nothing in our nest has changed it's still the same mess just like when I left  
The fridge is still empty the walls still have cracks and holes  
My side of the bed looks like it's been worn in  
The nightstand has more empty bottles than I remember  
I guess I brought you to this and your toothbrush is still lying in the bathroom sink  
I can't go home because your dirty clothes still line our bedroom floor  
I brought this onto myself I can't look around or be in this place  
It's just the way it was when I left everything is still out of place even me

# Pretending

## *Aubry Rodriguez*

I am watching him through the back porch screen door. He's flipping burgers on the grill, and I am watching his every move. His back is bare to the afternoon sun, and I love how his shorts hang down on his hips just low enough to see the tan line where his swimming trunks would sit. His dark skin and eyes have always drawn me in. His hands move swiftly while flipping the spatula; they are strong and virile, hands of a man any woman would love to have holding her.

I watch his every move and I think. I think of all the plans we've made for our future and of all the hard work we have already put into our lives just to make it to this very moment.... And I wonder how his eyes, so dark, how do they see right into my soul? His hands are so masculine and powerful, those are the hands that keep me safe from a world that is outside from our world.

"Babe, can you grab me a plate? This stuff is almost done."

My thoughts are broken for a moment and I smile at him through the screen door. I place my glass of red wine on the table next to me, and while making my way to the kitchen, I remember a time when he hated to do the cooking. Now, though, it seems as though I never plan our meals, or anything else for that matter. He has taken on many of the responsibilities of the household. He has taken on the responsibility of making it seem as if everything in our life is normal, as if nothing is going to change. He attends to my every need, making sure that I am completely satisfied. He makes sure my glass of wine is always full and my meals prepared just as I like. It is only for a moment that I think he has succeeded in providing a sense of normalcy. For a moment, I allow the red wine to swim around in my head and cover me with a warm sense of falseness. I take a plate off the shelf and I walk to the back porch calmer. And as I open the screen door to

hand it over to him, he looks at me with those deep brown eyes and brushes my finger with his, and it is at this moment that I am once again yanked back into reality.

Last September, the doctor told us the news. We just sat there and stared at each other for the longest time. He held my hand so tight that my fingers began to turn blue from the lack of blood flowing through them. I said nothing to make him ease his grip. I wanted to feel the pain, the pain was real and it was ours. I could feel his heart beat all the way down to the tips of his fingers, and I didn't want to let go. When the doctor told us, "6 months, a year at best," I felt as if all the oxygen in the room had suddenly disappeared as if my very own breath was being sucked out of my chest. It felt like I was about to faint. "Don't pass out," I found myself thinking, "Breathe...breathe...." We had been to so many doctors, gone through so many tests, and yet we were still not prepared for the final diagnosis. I could feel the tears starting to burn my face as they fell to the floor. I looked away from his eyes for a moment, instead looking down at my lap, trying to keep myself together for him. I looked into my lap, and again I saw his hands holding mine; I could see the strength and the love he had for me- the kind of love that I knew only came around once in a lifetime.

We ate our dinner on the back porch; we spoke about his mother's upcoming visit and made plans to take her to our favorite restaurant. We tossed around ideas about what to get my nephew for his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and laughed about how my sister was going to handle raising three boys. We talked about how good the food was that we were eating and about the beautiful day that had just passed and as we sat, ate and talked he never let go of my hand. He held on to the little time that we had left together; he held on while pretending that everything was going to be ok..



“Trail to Existence”

Silver Gelatin Print

Leah DiNucci

# Chill Me

*Catherine Hennick*

Run with the hare, Hunt with the hounds  
Under the moon when the wolves come out.  
Scent on the wind and drawing near,  
Sweet perfume of mortal fear.

On a cold night, the leaves crush on the ground.  
I see pin fire, light from a silent town.  
A star falls, streaks across the sky.  
The ravens flee, Shaken from a cry.

Chill Me to the Bone, Stone Terror!  
Chill Me to the Bone, Cold Horrors!

My hairs' on end, my heart's on edge  
All caution gone and to the wind.  
On a mission of Salvation and lost again.  
Can't read the signs, I'm blind with sin!

On a cold night, the leaves crush on the ground.  
I see pin fire, light from a burning tower.  
A star falls, streaks across the sky.  
The angels flee, shaken by a cry.

Chill Me to the Bone, Stone Terror!  
Chill Me to the Bone, Cold Horrors!

## Damn Eyelids

*Jennifer Abbott*

Everyone has those nights, the nights that you are fighting with your eyelids. You tell them to shut, and they do. But five minutes later you find yourself counting the knock-down bumps on your ceiling. Right when you hit 86, no longer hopeful of the sheep-counting effect you deemed reliant from your Sesame Street watching days, you say to yourself, "This is ridiculous, I just need to quiet my mind and go to sleep. It shouldn't be hard, I'm exhausted; I've been exhausted all week," and so on. Your mind is rattling off about all the reasons you should be tired. You give up; you turn on a light and squint for a couple of minutes, not sure of the point where you know you have just pushed your crow's feet to appear a year in advance. You pick up the book on your nightstand. Your eyes are drying out quickly; you catch those annoying eyelids in a blink that lasts about 10 seconds. That's when you decide to write. You can write with your eyes closed. You read your work. It's a paragraph of nonsense scribbled on the page about what you dreamed about last night and how much you wanted to get back to it. Another paragraph about what it means to be really tired, how profound. You turn off the light and look at the clock. You have to be up in 3 hours; you stare back up into insomnia right where you left off at 87.

## Don't Stumble On What Could Have Been

*Jennifer Miranda*

It's said that witches carry around brooms, but if that's so, angels must carry mops. If Forrest Gump was sitting next to Janis Jenkins preaching about how life was like chocolates, I'm sure she would quickly proclaim that her box was full of the ones nobody ever liked to eat. You know the ones with the most creatively disgusting fillings. Yeah, those were in her box. Deep down, everyone knew she was unhappy, yet she would disguise it with cheerfulness to others. I've never once heard her complain about the crappy candies life gave her.

She wore a ratty old tie-dye t-shirt with a faded Mickey Mouse on it. I never looked at her in any other way than as a human being. She had a job, not a notable one, but still, these days money is money. Material things were so far in the past that Janis couldn't recall a time when she had a new pair of Nikes or even a purse to keep whatever belongings she had.

I always had sympathy for her but knew deep down that there was nothing I could do to help the cause. I did talk to her from time to time, but it wasn't like I was contributing to send her on a full-paid trip to New York City.

I knew exactly when she was coming down my hallway, the old wheels on her cleaning cart screeched whenever she turned a corner.

I stepped out of my room, swung my Guess purse over my shoulder, and greeted her with a smile.

"How are you today?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm just fine," Janis replied, as she finished mopping the vanilla colored tiles. Her smile was just as faded as the t-shirt she wore.

"Janis, I was going to ask you about something..."

She turned back around with a face of innocence, the kind of expression a child has when you're about to tell them their puppy ran away.

"Have you ever actually taken the time to do something for yourself? Like maybe do something you enjoy?"

She held the mop in a direct vertical line parallel to her plump figure and brushed her frizzy long bangs away from her eyes.

"I work. It's the only thing I can do these days for myself. Besides, I actually enjoy it; it allows me to talk with people." She glanced to the floor for a few seconds and then made eye contact again. "I never would have imagined I would be here years ago, but I don't mind. Things could be worse."

This time I was the one displaying the expression of confusion; however, I forced a slight smile and nodded. I glanced around me and grabbed the doorknob, closing the door to materialism behind me.

## Late Night Hallway Race

*J. Charnin*

A worn blue carpet covers the floor. A dark stained wood trim four inches tall lines the bottom of the faded light blue hallway. A hallway with no character during the early morning rush always looks different at night. When I can see its flaws, the scuffs on the walls no one sees when people dressed neatly for work clutter up this hallway. By nightfall, they've all gone home leaving the hallway bare as an abandoned town, quiet. Late at night, fluorescent lights illuminate the imperfections; the coffee stains that mark the floor. Perhaps a hot cup of coffee slipped from someone's hand while juggling a suitcase and cell. Maybe a woman in a rush was looking at her watch, not paying attention to the man in front of her, also in a hurry - bump - spill - stain. The walls have their marks of business life as well; briefcase scuffs mark the walls as if businessmen swing their arms violently with no regrets. Dings randomly line the wall from packages that got away from their carriers. Does anyone else see these hallways? Could any of these hallway warriors recognize their battle field bare and empty?

## Rainbow in La Garita, Mexico

*Maria Matienzo*

The sweltering sun  
melts its palette,  
soft pastels unite.  
Golden yellow with red  
blend fiery orange with  
royal blue creating  
purples and teals,  
a transparent beauty  
against a pale blue slate  
surrounded by powdery white  
cumulus clouds with  
liquid silver linings  
glisten in the sky  
slowly drifting  
in paradise.

# Sleeping Love

*Samantha Shavín*

Shhh...  
He's asleep  
Peaceful, serene  
Lightly filling the air  
With rhythmic breaths  
A gentle wind, barely whistling  
Finds its way through parted lips  
A silent exhale quickly follows  
What an enticing display of tranquility!  
I maneuver towards the source  
Carelessly at first  
Unable to avoid the bed's squeaky reply  
As I stumble  
His body shifts  
And I hold my breath  
Silence  
My mouth  
Only inches away from capturing his sweet vapor  
I pursue my mission  
Eager to bear the consequence  
Of disturbing his slumber

# The Dancing Blade

*Samantha Shavín*

the silver sparkles  
smooth  
against my skin  
dangling down my arm  
in the dance of tears  
the metal is cold  
against my wrist  
a pretty piece of unattached jewelry  
making me feel better already  
as it cuts into my skin

# The Title

*Michael Donovan*

On those days when I feel like  
Some burnt out Rodin with  
Ten-foot arms stretching down  
To the ground where my twenty-foot  
Legs are planted firmly,  
Immobile in the dark brown earth,  
Spackled like chocolate frosting  
Spread at my feet.  
I keep my head down  
And refuse to look at the sky.

And on those days when I feel like  
Some dripping Dali with  
A hole in my breast  
Through which is seen one hundred  
Angels frantically flying  
From a mile-long shadow  
Creeping over the black line  
Of horizon like a puddle of paint.  
I twist my head all of the way back  
To peer behind myself  
As the sun melts in the distance.

Yet there are days when I feel like  
A fat-penciled Matisse,  
Bursting with grotesque contentedness  
As I lie naked on a pink satin pillow  
With a shiny gold tassel sewn to each corner.  
I look around,  
For I feel to be as beautiful  
As my backdrop and  
Have to bask in this moment of fame.



“Life”

Ink Wash

Elena Paredes Orsini

## Simple Mistakes

### Jennifer Hora

John never considered himself a good student, he was lazy; if there was anything else that needed to be done in his life at the time, it took priority over his homework. But that was then and this was now. Today, there was more pressure on him than any other day of his short-lived eighteen years of existence.

John's father suffered a stroke last summer and in his fading consciousness, he made John promise that he would study hard and get into college, whatever it took. Because he wanted more for John than what he had; several decades of manual labor and minimum wage rewarded his father with a job as a deli manager. That would just not be good enough for his son.

John's father was buried two days after the New Year began, and life became more of a struggle, but John used his conversation with his father to drive towards success. He took care of his mother, worked long hours at the deli, and studied the rest of the time. John was going to community college for two years and then transferring to a university to finish his degree. His tuition was taken care of by the deli in memory of John's father with the condition that he graduated on time with good grades.

He missed his father dearly, but it was the little things he missed the most. He missed sitting down to watch the baseball game with his father, or the late night talks and lessons of life.

John crammed for his last final all night. He finally crashed around three in the morning

and awoke with a jolt ten minutes after seven. He flew into the car and raced down State Road 9. John realized he was ten minutes from being locked out of the classroom, missing his last exam which would prevent him from graduating and ruining the few future plans he had ever made for himself.

Seven twenty-three, time was speeding just as fast as John. His foot pressed harder on the gas pedal as he contemplated his battle plan. The engine roared as if it knew it shouldn't be going that fast. "No cops, please, no cops," he whispered to himself. His heart raced faster and faster. The CD proceeded to track twelve. He

smacked his hands on the leather of the steering wheel to the beat.

"Six minutes, John. You've got this." A tone of confidence grew in his voice. "Two blocks from school and Mr. Henry's class is right



there. Just get out and haul butt." A smile of success portrayed across his face. The battle plan had been deployed and was appearing to be a success.

Quickly approaching his turn with five minutes left, time did not allow him to cautiously make the left, so without looking he turned the wheel and stomped on the gas again. The pressure was on to park the car and sprint to class. The clock on the radio switched to seven twenty-six. He neglected to notice another minute lost and the woman crossing the street pushing the stroller of her infant that had just entered the world a few months ago.

John looked up and panic-stricken,

swerved the car all the way to the right, onto the freshly cut-grass and the sidewalk. His heart stopped briefly as the mother froze halfway across the street, screaming with terror. "Oh, my God," he gasped out.

Seven twenty-seven, he turned his head around to make sure she was unharmed and with the blink of his eyes, he heard a horrific thump on the hood of the car and felt a jerk in his steering wheel. Instantly glancing forward, he could not see anything through the newly shattered windshield. Both feet slammed against the brake pedal to the floor of his car. Tires screeched as the tread slid across the pavement. The smell of burning rubber immersed through the air vents. All of his belongings flew forward from the back seat and crashed down on the dashboard and floor of the front seat.

He froze completely in his seat, hands glued to the steering wheel. He hadn't taken a breath since the noise and if what was outside was what he thought, he didn't want to breathe again.

Opening the door, his hand shook into a spasm. He couldn't find the strength to place his foot on the pavement. It seemed to take eternity to accomplish getting out of the car; although, it was really only a matter of seconds.

John looked to the front first, seeing nothing he took a breath and turned to the back of the car. All he could see were the toes of a foot. He raced to the back of the car to find a girl draped across the pavement on her side. "Someone call 911!" he shouted at the top of his lungs as he bent down towards the body. Tears filled his eyes and the knot in his throat consumed his air passage. He felt for a pulse but could not find one. She was dead. A piece of paper stuck halfway out of her jeans. He slid the paper out and read the message: "Just a note to say we love you, and we are so proud of our baby girl. Good luck, today. Love, mom and dad." Silence fell upon the street, except for the school bell announcing it was seven-thirty.



“Crystal Snail”

*Silver Gelatin Print*

Rosaura Berglas

# Sweet, Lost, Dangerous Males

Ben Gines

Cherie couldn't see a goddamn thing. If it weren't for the fact that her black shades completed her outfit and made her look cool, she would have taken them off and flung them into the Hudson River hours ago. Instead, Cherie pulled the sunglasses lower with a slender brown finger as traffic slowed for a red light on the West Side Highway.

All she needed was one more trick, and she'd have her share of the month's rent. It was already one week late, and her two wicked step-sisters were pissed they had to cover for her yet again. This time, they were making Cherie pay them back or she would be out on the streets where they found her.

That, simply, would not do.

Braced against the chilly April evening air, Cherie's eyes widened as a sleek, black limousine approached. A slight moan of anticipation escaped her.

"Ooooo! Money, she whispered to herself.

Delighted by the mystery of who might be traveling within, Cherie licked her lips and dug through her purse. She pulled out a stick of gum, unwrapped it, and popped it in her mouth. Putting on her brightest smile, she then approached the rear passenger door. A faint light showed movement.

Cherie blew a bubble and knocked on the tinted glass.

"Yoo-hoo! Anybody in there?"

Cherie popped the bubble and sucked the gum back into her mouth. She knocked again, her heart pounding with excitement.

"Is there something I can interest you in?"

Still no response.

"Heh-loooowwwwww!" Cherie hollered, realizing that a more direct approach might work better. "You in there! Wanna buy sum a aedis?" She turned and rubbed her bottom on the window.

The uniformed driver opened his door and stepped out.

"Hey! What the hell you think you're doin'?"

"Nothing." Cherie turned and smiled sweetly. She popped her gum, then licked her lips lewdly. The driver stared, captivated. "I just thought maybe you, or your...friend in the back could use some female company. Or, maybe both?"

"You crazy or something? Get the hell away from the car, you tranny bitch!"

"Tranny? Who you calling a tranny?" Cherie jerked back, insulted.

"Look at yourself! You sure as hell don't look like a woman to me."

"More woman than *you'll* ever have!" Cherie retorted. She started walking towards the driver. "And I'll have you know that except for this," Cherie grabbed herself obscenely, "I am *ALL* woman!"

The driver snorted, shook his head in amusement, then folded himself back into the limousine.

Cherie stamped her foot indignantly, sighed, then clicked her tongue in disappointment. Why were tricks getting so hard to find? It wasn't like she had much competition anymore; the other girls were all moving back up to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Tompkins Park, and even off to Houston Street. As for the trannies, one by one, they were slowly disappearing off the street.

As the black limousine pulled away, Cherie couldn't help but feel her heart sink a little. Regardless of whether she tricked with or not, every man she pinned a hope to, left her feeling empty when they had gone. She stood still and stared a moment after the car's red lights.

*Ah, fuck it! I'll just take a cab back home and call it a night.*

Just then, a beat-up Volkswagen Beetle slowly approached the curb. The car horn tooted meekly behind her.

Cherie turned, gum snapping.

Through the windshield, she saw the silhouette of a man stretched across the front seat rolling down the passenger window. Like a comedic runway model, Cherie placed a

hand on her hip, sucked her cheeks in and strutted towards the car.

A fat, pudgy hand tempted her with a crisp, fifty-dollar bill.

"Is it enough?" A husky voice spoke from inside. It was more than what she needed.

Cherie leaned forward and was overwhelmed by the sight of the large man crammed into the driver's seat. Her ready smile froze on her face in a grimace. She recovered quickly and swallowed back her disgust by blowing, then popping, another large bubble.

"That depends, Big Man. Whatcha looking for?" Cherie blinked and looked into the man's droopy eyes. The smile was back on her face.

"Whatever I can get for this much money."

Cherie bit her lower lip. For a fleeting moment, she thought of snatching the money and making a run for it. She was sure she could escape him. It would be the easiest money she'd ever made.

"Please. It's all I have." The man squeezed his fist and clutched the bill tighter as if he could read her mind.

Behind them, car horns blared, urging them to move.

"Well, I'm sure we can come to some agreement!" Cherie offered the man hopefully.

The passenger door creaked open and Cherie squeezed in.

"So, where do we go?" The man asked nervously. He shoved the bill in his shirt pocket while Cherie spit her gum out the window.

"Let's go to the Meat Packing District. No one will bother us there."

The big man hesitated, then looked at Cherie questioningly.

"Don't worry, Big Man. I'll guide you there. Just go south and get into the far lane. You wanna turn left in a couple blocks."

Cherie smiled brightly as she pressed against the man and rubbed a hand over his chest. Inside, however, she sighed. As he

leaned his foot on the gas pedal, the car engine wheezed and groaned. Cherie rolled her eyes behind her shades. Of all the men in the world, she had to wind up with an overweight Fred Flintstone *and* his lousy car.

Moments later they were parked in a littered alleyway partially hidden by large trucks. The big man turned to Cherie, his hands still on the wheel.

"So, here we are." He licked his lips anxiously as beads of sweat appeared on his brow.

"We certainly are, Big Man." Cherie turned to him seductively. "You can let go of the wheel now."

"What? Oh."

There was an awkward moment of silence where all Cherie could hear was the excited, ragged wheezing of the man's lungs struggling for more air and the sound of his gurgling stomach.

"And what did you want little Cherie to do for you tonight?" She rubbed his large, sweaty chest. It was like molding Play-Doh. Cherie had to control herself to keep from squirming.

"There's...so much I haven't done." The man gasped.

"Really? A big, strong man like you?"

"Most girls...they're revolted by me." His breathing grew heavier as he continued speaking. "I can't...can't get them to...do anything. Know what I mean? Even when I offer them money. But you...you're not like the other girls. Are you?"

Cherie laughed.

"No. I'm definitely *not* like the other girls. And as for this," Cherie placed a hand over the man's shirt pocket. "Fifty bucks won't buy you all that, but...there must be *something* your little heart wants more than anything in the world." Cherie leaned into him and continued to rub his chest.

The big man thought and stuttered as he glanced at her.

"What is it?" Cherie prodded, her hand sinking lower. "C'mon, you can tell me.

What's the one thing you want more than anything?"

The big man moaned and stared wantonly at Cherie as she rubbed him.

"You...you have such...such beautiful lips."

Cherie's sweet smile grew broader and deeper with knowing. She bit her lower lip, glanced down demurely, then back up at her john.

"Thank you." She replied silently, her lips moving seductively. She then tried to unzip his pants. She struggled for a moment before enlisting his help and, even then, it took some doing.

"Whew! There we go," Cherie said with a smile and finally thrust her hand into the big man's pants. She fished around, allowing him to cover the back of her neck with his paw.

But before her lips touched him, the fat man squealed and quivered prematurely. Something sticky and wet landed on her cheek. Cherie found herself trapped between the steering wheel, his hand, and the man's undulating stomach. There was nothing for her to do but wait.

After a few seconds, the fat man grew still. He released his hold on the back of Cherie's neck.

"So. Was that good for you, Big Man?" She sat up and wiped her cheek, then rubbed her head where it had pressed against the steering wheel.

He took a deep breath, as if suddenly awakened.

"I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?"

"Not at all! I just thought I'd never get my head back, that's all."

"I'm really sorry. That...that doesn't usually happen." The man muttered, trying to disguise his embarrassment with a lie.

"I'm sure." Cherie smirked. She'd seen it all too many times before. Cherie stuck her hand out palm up.

"I don't suppose you'd consider giving me a discount, would ya?"

"A discount? Why?

"Well...I didn't get to really enjoy anything. I mean, it all just kinda happened."

"That's not *my* fault!" Cherie stared blankly, unable to believe what she was hearing.

"Aw, c'mon. It's not like you really did anything."

"Like hell I didn't!" Cherie lunged and reached for the man's pocket. She snatched the fifty-dollar bill, opened the car door, and jumped out. She emerged from the pissy alley and walked away as fast as her long legs would allow.

Behind her, the car engine started and slowly backed out of the street. The Beetle caught up and crept alongside.

"I'm sorry. I can't help it. I'm cheap, I know."

Cherie snorted.

"Can I drop you off somewhere?"

"No!"

"Please. Don't be mad at me."

"Will you just go away? Leave me alone!"

"Fine! Fuck you, then. You're probably a miserable cocksucker, anyway."

Cherie stopped short, her jaw slack with disbelief.

"Why, you motherfucker! How *dare* you!" Cherie turned, ready to tell him just what she thought of him, but the big man was already pulling away. The engine groaned, then farted, and the beat-up Beetle sputtered away.

Cherie stood choking and coughing in a cloud of exhaust.

"You...stupid...fat, fuck! Pervert! Sweaty pig! Little dick!"

But there was no one around to hear her insults. The car had already disappeared around the corner.

Cherie sighed heavily and thought, as she started walking. *Just once, I'd like to be treated like a lady!*

# The Magician

*Alexa Robles*

Dice evolved from finger bones-  
He gambles with his hands.  
Every shake is a turn in the game.  
However do you know if you are winning?  
It's the DT's or a roulette wheel  
And it's the vodka so the roulette is always Russian.  
There's a cup on the table, turned over  
Its bottom makes the moon.  
In that round reflection of the palm of his hand,  
He says he can tell your future.  
The highball is a scrying bowl.

When he coughs it's the sound of dice clacking together,  
Making electricity of abdomen.  
And lightening drives out the phlegm from his lungs.  
The shifts of the sea say storms are coming.  
It's a watery grave  
Where guilt goes to play,  
In the dungeon he calls his stomach.  
Bile is the exalted form of grief.

Turn of the head- -  
I'll bet on the reds.  
The Magician hacks- -  
Put my money on the blacks.  
Once, were you ever gifted?  
I know what it's like to lose it all.  
The Lady left me cos I couldn't stop.  
And my Muse is an Indian-giver.

The little girls laugh to see this sight-  
When I'm divining the future in my Tom Collins-  
And don't you know that the loveliest Fools  
Grow up to be Empresses in our world.

This bar's my Temple of Doom- ha-  
When I die what will my liver tell them?  
Let em slice me up out back with the debris of the cock-fights  
Then they can cast the bones as well.  
I used to do gigs at kids' birthday parties-  
The runes on my arms are spelled in rabbit scratches  
For an extra five bucks I'd tell their future using melted candles  
From a cake that invariably tasted like toothpaste.  
Now even the air tastes like gin.  
If I'm hanged let them do it from a juniper bush.  
And then I'll be the happy Hanged Man.

Have you ever been gifted?  
I know what it is to lose it all.  
They say that nothing's certain but death and taxes  
But I know that there is no sure thing.

# Carta para Sara

*Brenda C. Tillit*

No has nacido y ya eres grande  
Porque vienes con amor al mundo  
Llenaras una casa sin paredes  
de tu sonrisa que opacara al sol  
us pasos aun no dados  
adivinan que te espera mucho  
Unos padres, una hermana  
y tantas cosas por descubrir  
Llegaras un dia, el que quieras  
sea de noche o de manana  
Y se abrira para ti la ventana  
del saber y del crecer  
Buscaras alimento pronto  
porque sabes lo que necesitas  
Quien dijo que un bebe no sabe?  
Si viene de la fuente del saber que es Dios?  
Tus sonrisas, llantos y juegos  
mantendran a todos ocupados  
Y aprenderas de todo, de ninos  
de la escuela, del amor, del dolor  
Seras la hermana companera  
aquella que todos anhelamos  
Aunque quizas discutan por un rato  
pero el carino nunca acabara  
Quizas nunca sepa mas de ti  
es que la vida  
Un dia lo entenderas  
Pero prometeme que cuando la tarde caiga  
sobre tus padres ya viejos  
Y sus ojos no te divisen  
ni se acuerden de tu cumpleanos  
Los pondras en tu vientre  
como si fueran tus hijos para protejerlos  
Que alli es el principio  
pero tambien es el fin.  
Sara, cuando crezcas y no llueva  
cuando quieras ver sus goats  
Y cuando no haya una luna en lo alto  
para iluminar tu playa  
Nunca olvides que no importa  
que la vida es mas que eso  
Que la vida tiene un regalo dentro  
que eres tu misma desde el nacer.

## Ghosts Watching

### Kim Nguyen

At the beginning of May, the month of Rosary, the villagers of Cau Tron were supposed to have a family-prayer on the Rosary every night for the whole month. That was the priest's order, and he warned he would go around and check on the praying, on each family unit.

So the lambs of God did what the priest told them to do. The Cau Tron villagers, who built themselves a church, who invited a Father into their lives, never thought twice about what the priest said. God had chosen the priest to represent Him on Earth. Either you believed or you would be condemned to hell.

It was so simple.

"What more do you want than Heaven?"

Father always said.

Be saved or be damned. It was not a very hard choice for the villagers.

The priest has been in this village for quite long. He was very confident about his obedient lambs who, including children, learned to work hard in the rice field to survive and learned to please God as well. The villagers had practiced the church's ideal by heart: the more you pleased God, the more benedictions you could get. That was how the priest and the lambs of God had built up a devoted parish.

After the evening meal around seven P.M., the priest in his long dark robe went out on his duties as usual. His right hand held the Rosary. He too was praying during his inspection.

Night fell fast in May. The prayers and songs of the Rosary resounded from afar on the light breeze, blending with the smell of the rice field on the Saigon riverband.

Joining with the resonance of the holy evening was the rhyme of the noisy frogs who chanted for rain.

The adventure-crickets also caroled accordingly.

Head up under the dusky sky, Father felt contented. He was thankful for another sacred

day.

When he made a turn at the blind end of the village, he noted something...

The priest stopped walking.

His left hand on his glowering face. "It's not the Rosary," Father grunted.

Like a black bat that could hear without seeing, he moved forward to a strange sound.

It came from Old Phong's house.

From the dark, the priest saw the television's screen in blurred black and white pictures through the wide-open front doors.

"A television!" The priest burst into the house, his hands shaking with rage.

"Stolen Rosary!" Father almost yelled. His face was furious.

The priest came closer reluctantly....

"Stolen Rosary!" Again, his voice trembled.

There were about a dozen children, some teen boys, and several male grown-ups, all sitting neatly in front of the television, the only one in the village, which was on the table beneath the family altar. His lambs were watching Jacques Cousteau's Sea World, not praying on the Rosary in May.

Meantime, Old Phong did not watch the Cousteau program but sat at the table behind the TV. His head bent down. His hands held a small radio with its long antenna. His eyes wide open, Old Phong enjoyed the thirty minute BBC World News from which he thought he could learn something about the outside world.

Wordlessly, the priest walked into the house. One hand unplugged the wire, the other picked up the handle of the 13 inch B&W TV. The priest then stepped from the house and disappeared into the darkness. All Cousteau's fans ran at once, frightened, except for the old man who sat still.

Only the beautiful accustomed northern voice of the BBC reporter, Do Van read the news in Vietnamese, and filling the background, the Phamduy's folk song in Thaithanh's pitched voice...

From the family altar, his dead wife and son, in their pictures, had been watching all.

## STAFF THOUGHTS

We have often been told that "beauty is skin deep." But how true is that really? If a person is physically beautiful does that mean that that person is ugly on the inside? We have also been told that "beauty fades." But how true is that really? If a person was beautiful in his or her youth, does that mean that when one ages, the word beautiful can no longer be used to describe that person? There are so many more phrases and quotes that we have heard about beauty, so many about truth. But, what it really boils down to, is what we choose to believe. Life will forever take us through many roads, some may be straight, narrow and a little bumpy. So, if the trials that we experience can be seen on our skin, that not only makes us beautiful, but it also makes us strong.

As Keats said in "Ode On A Grecian Urn," "*Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*" Then if we want to know the truth about people, and even our selves, then maybe we should look a little bit deeper than just the surface.

*Lysette Taylor, Editor*

*"The unexamined life is not worth living." - Socrates*

This is a favorite quote of mine. I believe it reflects on the nature of truth and beauty in the sense that real beauty can only be found in knowing what is true. Beauty can not be found in sugar-coated euphemisms. Indeed, life is full of difficulties and we must often face issues that are unpleasant or uncomfortable to think about, but we must not fool ourselves into believing that all is well with the world when it is not. We must strive to find the truth in everything and not take things at face value. Once we know the truth, we can begin to make our world a more beautiful place.

*Grant Abraham, Design Editor*

*"Beauty is an ecstasy; it is as simple as hunger. There is really nothing to be said about it. It is like the perfume of a rose: you can smell it and that is all." --W. Somerset Maugham*

This quote pretty much says it all; there's not much else to be said about beauty. Beauty is just something you have to experience for yourself.

*Wanda Deleon, Poetry Editor*

*"Most writers regard truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are most economical in its use." -Mark Twain*

Whether you're a writer, artist, or poet, truth will surface in the work of art. I believe there is beauty in that truth. Beauty and truth work together not only in art, but in life as well. Why is it so easy to tell a lie than to tell the truth? Although the truth may hurt, the truth also brings out the real beauty and the true aura of a person. No matter how hard the truth may be to tell, people will appreciate the truth and, in turn, beauty will emerge.

*Maria Matienzo, Fiction Editor*

*"It is not sufficient to see and to know the beauty of a work. We must feel and be affected by it."*

*-Voltaire*

*Diallo Palmer, Technical Support*

## P'AN KU STAFF



Left to right: Wanda Deleon, Poetry Editor; Maria Matienzo, Fiction Editor; Grant Abraham, Design Editor.



Lysette Taylor, Editor



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The P'an Ku staff would like to thank Elisa Albo, Vicky Santiesteban, Charlie Lyle and our advisor for being patient with us.

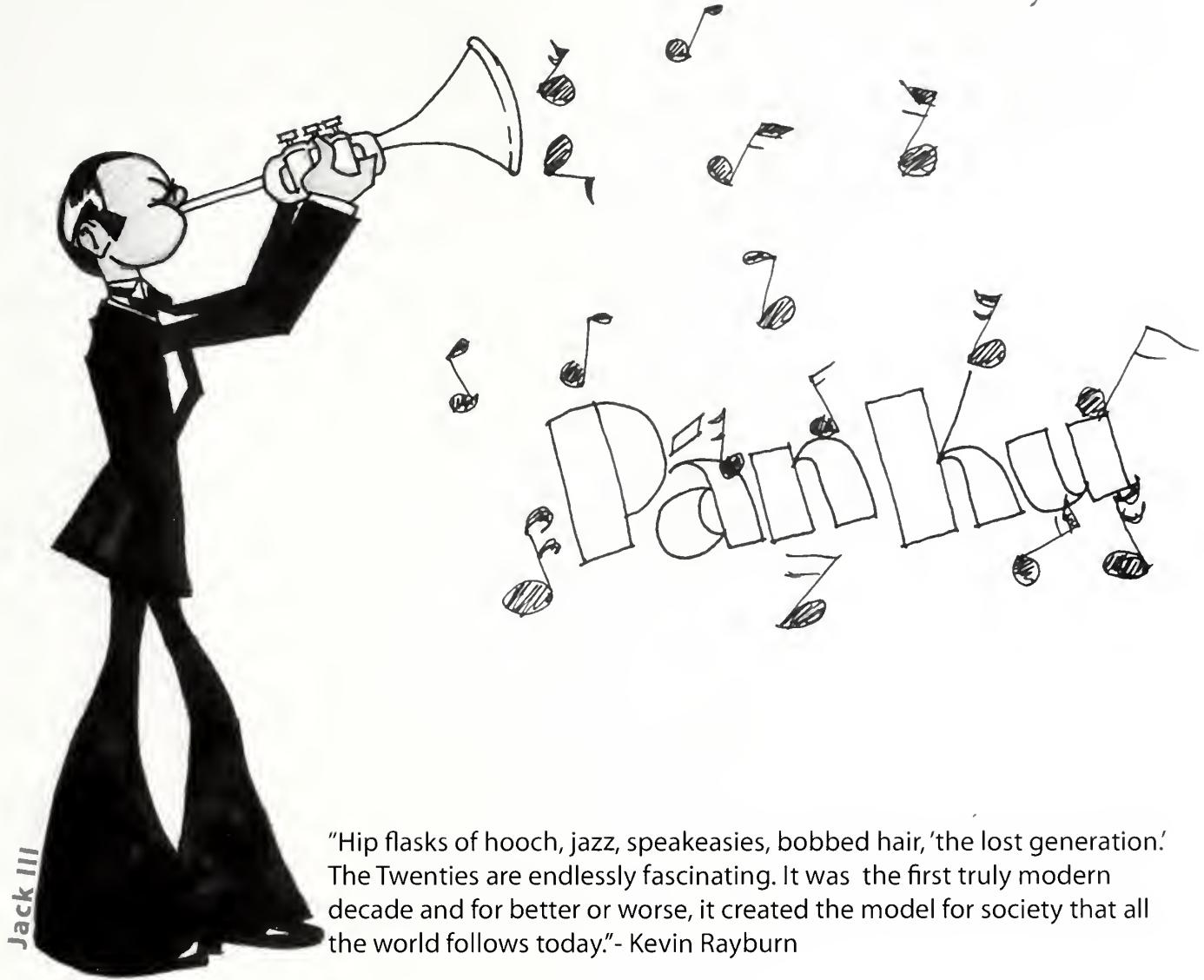


Pan Ku  
The Broward Community College  
Student Literary/Arts Magazine

# P'AN KU







"Hip flasks of hooch, jazz, speakeasies, bobbed hair, 'the lost generation.' The Twenties are endlessly fascinating. It was the first truly modern decade and for better or worse, it created the model for society that all the world follows today." - Kevin Rayburn

### **In Loving Memory of Alberta Mary Ellingham**

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Cynthia Grunder Malaney

"Through These Eyes"

B&W Photography

# SWIMMERS

Diane Larson

After Frost

*Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens. -- Brian Eno, Talking Heads*

When I see swimmers stroke left arm over right  
across lanes lined with float ropes  
I like to think "The Cave of Swimmers" art  
has come to life from Michael Ondaatje's story  
or of the ribbon of muscle across the biceps  
built by the pitch of hands, built by a greased man  
who cracks the ice in Lake Michigan's  
Polar Bear Club, or by a sun-screened lifeguard  
who jumps into Florida's triathlon.

She is first drawn to the Chicago River  
she grows up on the North Side  
dead-end street. Her parents say  
*Don't go there.* The crowd, the police,  
the crane pulls out a body, gray, bloated,  
its rubbery limbs intact, it hits the bank.

But I was going to say when Death broke in  
with all her matter-of-fact finality—

I should prefer to have some girl play in summer  
go outside and in to escape the heat  
wait, in her swimsuit, on her brother  
who promises to get her in line  
for a one-hour swim at Welle's Park pool.  
Arm-pull, flutter-kick, she learns to dive off  
a springboard, to recover from a belly flop,  
learns not to launch out too soon,  
keeps the bathing suit on  
after hitting the water hard.

She learns to swim underwater, streamlined,  
lungs exhale all their breath until she flings up  
breaks the surface, gulps in air.

She walks home wrinkled, hungry, squinting  
in the afternoon sun, she never wears goggles,  
eyes bloodshot, burning, just close them—  
the same pain of staying up with the Late Show  
when TV is the only night light.

So was I once myself a swimmer of oceans  
and so I dream of going back,  
weary of the work week,  
my face burns with the boss's reprimand,  
and one eye is weeping, the same eye that  
took a sharp stick when as a kid I was  
pushed down by my best friend, Nancy.

I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
then come back to it and begin over—

May no guardian angel willfully  
misunderstand me, don't let me forget to  
come up for air. Earth's the right place  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I like to swim until all thought is gone  
 lulled in salt water, held in the ocean  
until the lifeguard whistles me in  
and earth calls ashore her swimmer.



"Ghost in the Window"

Tiffany Chappell

B&W Film

# A MORNING CONFRONTATION

Kenneth Leon

**S**he opened the door on the first knock.

On a normal day, she would look beautiful. Absolutely angelic. She had that glowing skin, beaming smile, the flowing black hair, and those piercing brown eyes that almost seemed to gaze into your soul.

Today was not a normal day.

Today, she looked anguished and disturbed, like she had lost something dear to her. She was pale, her hair limp and messy. I could see in her eyes that there was no spirit or joy...only fear.

"Anthony, thank God you're here," she said, a small look of relief appearing on her face.

"Yeah, are you alright?"

"I-I'm fine..." she said quietly, her eyes shifting down to the floor.

"Monica!" a desperate voice from inside the apartment bellowed.

It was him.

Her eyes flickered back up to me. I could see the tears now.

"Help him," she whispered.

And with that, she let me into the apartment.

The place was in order. We were in the living room, and my eyes glanced over the hardwood floor, the expensive-looking black leather couch, the big screen TV, and the large bay windows which always had that great view of the city. The morning sun streamed into the room, bathing everything in light.

"He's in there," I heard her say behind me. "The kitchen."

To my right, I saw the closed door to the room and I took a few cautious steps towards it.

"He has a knife..." she said after a moment, her voice faltering.

I froze mid-step. Then spun around to face her.

"A knife?" I said incredulously.

She didn't respond. Her eyes avoided mine.

"I told you not to keep those kinds of things around!"

"There was only one!" she yelled angrily. "I didn't think he would find it!"

The room fell silent. Monica slowly took a seat on the couch, and put a hand to her forehead, her eyes downcast. She began to weep quietly.

I took a deep breath, looking down at the floor. I didn't mean to yell at her. I wanted to apologize, but

then a cry erupted from the kitchen, followed by the sound of something shattering.

Monica's head jerked up to the door. I turned.

Christ, I had to stop him.

I moved over to the door and tried the knob. It was locked. I pounded on the door, then pressed my ear to it. There were muffled sounds of movement inside. It also sounded like the faucet was running.

I pounded on the door again, harder this time.

"Kevin, it's me, Anthony! Open the door!"

For a few seconds there was no response and my heart began to race. Then I heard him.

"Anthony?" His voice sounded low and ragged.

"Yeah, it's me. Unlock the door!"

"Are you alone?"

"Of course, now open the door!"

There was more silence. After a few moments I heard the lock click.

I glanced back at Monica. She watched intently, her hands gripping the cushions of the couch tightly.

I turned back to the door, twisted the knob, then pushed it open cautiously.

The small kitchen was in shambles. The cupboards and drawers were open; all of them, and the silverware from the drawers had been emptied out onto the counters. The faucet was running full blast, steadily filling the sink with water. Immediately, my eyes caught sight of the broken plates on the floor, many of them shattered into small pieces. It was a small field of ruined china that Kevin had navigated through to get to the kitchen table at the back of the room. There was a window to the left of the table, and Kevin was shrouded in sunlight, but I could see that he was there, sitting at the table, his back faced to me.

I went over to the sink, avoiding the broken plates, and turned off the faucet. The water had just reached the brim of the sink.

"Close the door," Kevin said softly.

I walked back to the door slowly. In a quick glance. Monica's bewildered eyes met mine. She looked hurt.

I closed it as quietly as possible and turned back to him. He still sat there, his back to me.

"What the hell are you doing, Kevin?" I asked.

"I'm going to kill myself."

He said this so morbidly and so casually that I was taken off-guard by it. For a moment there was silence as I felt the air escape from my lungs.

"No, no you're not." I replied.

Kevin got up out of the chair and turned around. He was a mess. There were deep bags

under his eyes, and stubble on his chin. His body was thin and muscular as if he had lost weight, and it was obvious that he hadn't been eating. His eyes were wild, and I knew I was dealing with it now.

With a fierce cry he picked up the chair and hurled it violently against the wall next to him. I jumped at this sudden outburst. The chair left a large dent in the drywall.

He grabbed something off the table, then faced me again.

It was a serrated steak knife, pressed close to his side. He gripped the handle tightly.

"I'm going to do it." Kevin said. "You're not going to stop me."

I swallowed. My mouth felt dry, and now there was a pain in the pit of my stomach.

"Kevin, put it down," I commanded, taking a step towards him.

Instantly he raised the knife, pointing it at me. The hand holding the knife was trembling.

"Stay back."

"Kevin, just put down the damn knife." I said. "Why do you need to do this?"

He said nothing.

"Answer me."

"I have to," he replied quietly.

"That's not a good reason at all," I said.

He didn't respond.

"Kevin, listen to me," I started slowly. "Are you taking the pills?"

Still no response.

"Are you taking the medication?" I stressed.

A look of annoyance appeared on his face.

"No, I'm not taking the damn medication!" he yelled agitatedly.

Crap. It was a stupid question. Of course he wasn't taking them. If he had been I wouldn't be trying to talk him out of killing himself right now.

"Why aren't you taking them?" I asked.

He didn't respond.

"Kevin, the pills keep you calm."

"The pills control me."

"No, they stop you from doing stupid things, like putting a damn knife to your throat." I replied callously. "You know what they say about suicide? It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

Kevin's eyes narrowed.

"What I have," he said. "I carry with me for the rest of my life. A permanent problem requires a permanent solution."

It was a cold, clear reply, and I found that I couldn't respond to it.

I took another step towards him, and there was a sharp cracking sound. I looked down to see that a large shard of a broken plate had split under my shoe. I now saw that he was barefoot, and noticed the small smears of blood on the tile.

It was a trigger. In a quick motion, he raised his chin upward, exposing his neck, and put the blade to his throat.

"Stop!" I yelled.

"One more step... take one more step!" he challenged.

I was breathing hard now. This was not normal.

The room fell silent.

The blade didn't move from his throat. We watched each other; the only sound in the room was a constant drip from the faucet.

I had to change my approach, calm him down somehow. I took a deep breath and started again.

"Kev, you think you're having a bad day?"

"...What?"

"I said, do you think that you're having a bad day?"

He didn't respond. I kept talking.

"You may think you're having a bad day, but believe me, you're not. I'm having a much worse one than you are. You know what happened to me? I...I..."--I was trying to figure out what to say--"I poured orange juice into my cereal. Do you know pissed off that made me? And I couldn't throw it out because I got a dead end job and I can't waste the money. I had to eat that cereal with the...the, uh..."

"The orange juice," he said quietly.

"Yes!" I replied, pointing at him.

He didn't take his eyes off me, but now the cold stare had been replaced with a blank one. It was obvious that he had no idea what the hell I was talking about.

Hell, I had no idea what the hell I was talking about. I just had to keep talking to him.

"So, after that," I continued, "I get in my crappy car and go to my crappy job, and I argue with my boss. And every week he tells me not to come back, and I won't...I'd rather kill myself--"

I stop.

Freaking idiot!

"I-I mean--I hate working there, but I have to. And then today, I get a call from Monica. She's crying. She tells me that you're going to kill yourself. And that made my day worse."

The arm holding the knife twitched a bit. Was fatigue setting in? Or was he actually listening to me?

"You should have heard her," I continued softly. "She's so worried about you, man, you have no idea. She loves you so much, and you are hurting her. You know, right now you are doing the worst thing you could possibly ever do to her. It doesn't matter how shitty my day or your day is going, but she's having a worse one than both of us combined and that is exactly why you should stop this."

I took a step forward with my hand outstretched, ignoring the sound of the broken dishes.

"Now, give me the knife." I said.

Kevin closed his eyes and exhaled. For a moment he didn't do anything. The knife at his neck began to shake, almost as if he was fighting the decision to do it or not. He then pulled it away from his neck and held it out to me.

I did it. I stopped him. A wave of relief came over me.

"Man, you did the right thing," I said as I reached forward to grab the handle.

But then Monica ruined everything.

The kitchen door flew open behind me as she burst into the room. I quickly turned and wrapped an arm around her midsection as she tried to rush past me to Kevin, and pulled her away from the broken plates on the floor.

"Let me go!" she screamed, trying to wrestle out of my grip. "Kevin, please don't do it!"

Kevin stood there silently, his expression blank. The knife was down at his side now.

"Monica, calm down!" I yelled, trying to hold her with both arms. "I don't want you to step on the glass on the floor!"

"Let go of me Anthony!"

"Stop it Monica! He's not going to do it, I stopped him!"

At those words, she calmed down, and I gently let go of her. She looked at Kevin.

He dropped the knife. There was a clang as it hit the floor.

I snatched it up and put it on the counter, out of his reach, then took a broom from the closet near the door and swept the broken plates off to the side. When

the way was clear she ran to him and embraced him. crying. He returned the embrace.

I let them have their moment, and left the room.

- - -

She stopped me at the front door.

"So that's it?" she asked. "You're leaving?"

"Yeah," I said. "I have to get back to work."

"But what if he starts acting like that again?" she asked, moving closer to me. "I won't be able to help him, I-I-wouldn't know what to do."

She looked up at me with those striking brown eyes. and for a moment I didn't want to leave her.

I couldn't do this.

I took a step back and averted my eyes away from hers.

"Let him sleep for a while," I said. "Let the pills kick in. He'll be alright, just make sure that he takes two everyday, no matter what he says or does. Sneak it into his food if you have to. It'll keep him calm."

Monica folded her arms on her chest and looked down at the floor. "Yeah..." she said quietly.

"Listen," I said. "I know that this was your first time seeing him act that way, but as long as you get him to keep taking the medication, I promise, you'll never see that side again."

She nodded. "Alright."

"Take care of him. And if you're still feeling worried, call Dr. Lewis, okay? He'll be able to help you. I have to get back to work."

Without a word Monica came forward and wrapped her arms around me, holding me close, her head on my chest.

It felt unreal, almost as if time itself had stopped. Everything had melted away. There were no more problems. Kevin was alright, and I didn't have to deal with his outbursts anymore. If only it could stay like that.

Gently, I pushed her away, and stepped out into the hall. I looked back at her, and the rays of the morning sun seemed to make an aura of light around her as she stood in the doorway.

"See you later Monica," I said quietly.

"Bye," she whispered.

I started towards the elevator. My hands started shaking slightly now, as it all began to sink in. I heard the door to my brother's apartment close softly behind me.

## KATHERINE PART 1 (11/12/04)

Madelaine Triana

The energy you've exposed has melted away the blockades,  
As you skim through all my belongings to taste me again.

Knocking on your memories,  
You ask all the questions that were lingering in doubt,  
The answers that I caressed made you smile in ease,  
Not wanting any of those moments to end or leave.

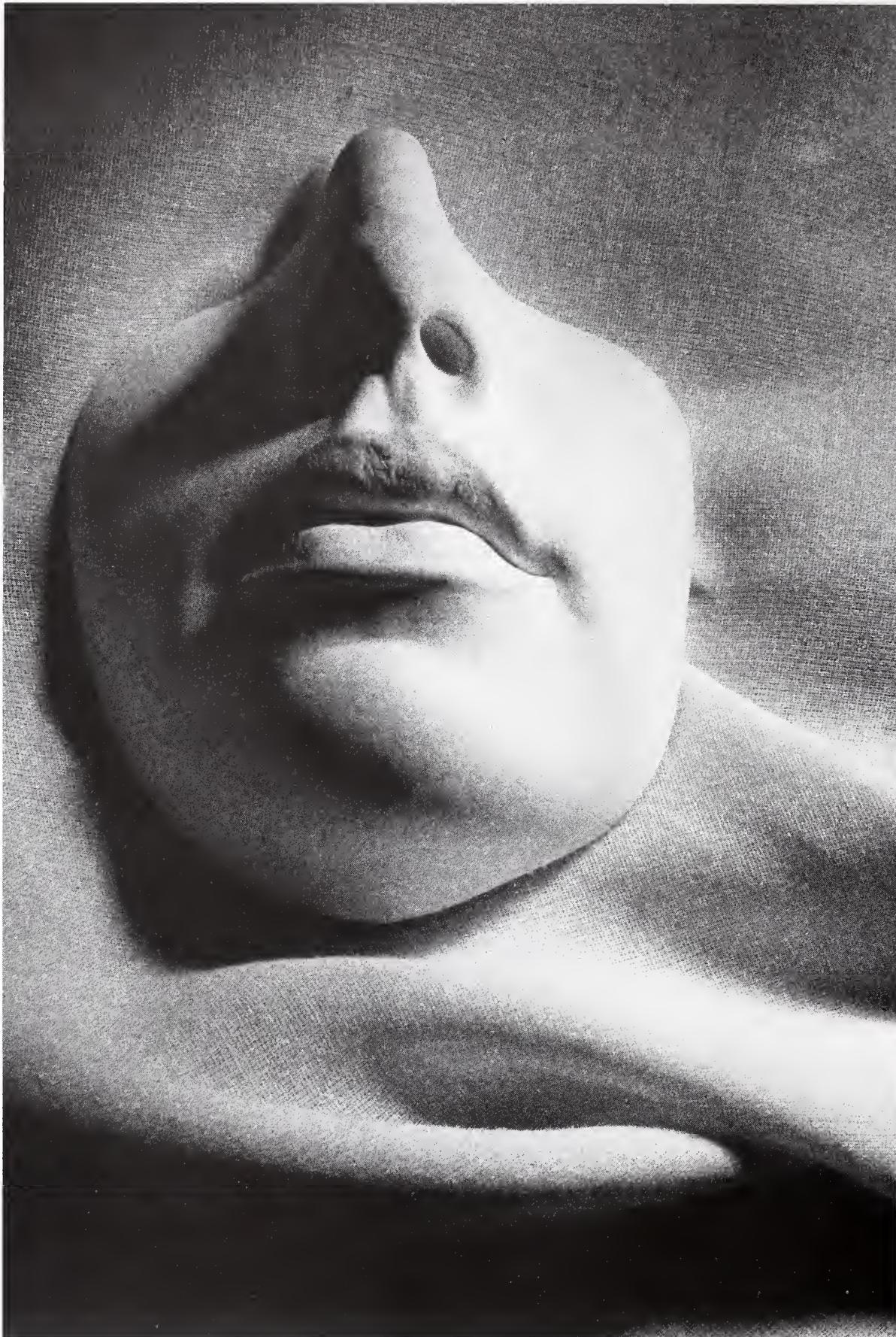
So drown yourself in my love,  
For my ocean is all I could let you swim in.  
Swim through me my angel  
and conquer all the blocks that are in your way.  
Rule me like the ruler of earth,  
And bestow consciousness lively into my being.  
Allow this body of water to create from your source of energy,  
Making it our own perfect circle of life.

Hunt me like the hunters,  
While enjoying the sport!  
Crave for me like food,  
devouring me alive.  
Breathe me in like air,  
Making my existence a necessity to your life.  
Shower me with your all,  
As I wallow in your presence.  
Feel me,  
As I connect my fingertips to your soul.  
Love me,  
Because I have never found any other place,  
as beauteous like the two worlds we made as one.  
Together we've melted the blockades,  
So go ahead,  
Feel free to run.

## KATHERINE PART 2 (1/13/05)

Madelaine Triana

Two months from today,  
we were laying in heaven's bed  
Discussing how we made love  
And decided to stay again.  
Two months ago,  
Asleep in a new day,  
Connecting our souls in such an intimate way.  
Only two months have passed  
And I still remember it like a yesterday;  
Fresh from the makings  
Filled with gratitude long due  
In such a heavenly manner.  
Two months that I can't explain,  
Have slipped through a leak  
Evaporating our connection into a space of my memory.  
Two months,  
That's it,  
Just two months ago,  
I was in a wonderland  
Where my persona didn't control,  
Didn't shy,  
Didn't hesitate.  
Just blended with the world's rotation  
Moved along with gravitation  
Expanding our love's encounter in gradations  
Which lead up to an unexpected,  
Final destination.  
Destined to be where I am today,  
Not with she,  
The woman I love.  
It's been two months  
Since I've explored what love was.  
Love I've never experienced.  
Two months in a detoured path,  
I didn't expect to encounter.  
Filled with new days  
Yet corrupted with memories  
That have haunted me  
Since yesterday:  
Your face; my angel  
Your body; my temple.  
Two months ago on this day  
I was laying in heaven's bed.



"Face Off"

Franka Meadows

B&W Photography



"Masked"

Lesley Lopez

Charcoal

# **BUT, I AM DIFFERENT**

Stacey Grossman

I am in elementary school.

I have special left-handed scissors with a special red handle.

I have trouble saying the Pledge of Allegiance because my left hand wants to be over my heart.

My teachers try to get me to use my right, because to them, "right is write."

But, I am different.

I am left-handed.

I am in middle school.

I hold my schoolbooks pressed against my left-hand side.

I wave hello with my left hand.

I walk with my left foot forward and seem to trip on end.

But, I am different.

I am left-handed.

I am in high school.

I need left-handed scissors, but my art class has none.

I use a left-handed notebook to pen my left-handed notes.

I hold the pencil wrong, as so many right-handers have said.

But, I am different.

I am left-handed.

I am in college.

I use the left-handed desk in the left-hand row on the left-hand side of the room.

I can't see the board on the far side of the room.

I raise my left hand to answer a question, unnoticed to right-handed man.

But, I am different.

I am left-handed.



"Saki It To Me"

January Gatto

Photography

# GLORY NORTHBOUND

Michael Donovan

Gloria (“Glory” to her friends) hated people who killed babies. It was against God. Abortion was pure, undiluted evil. It lacked any shred of moral decency. Those doctors were modern-day monsters, all of them.

Henry Libbit led the protest today. He waved his sign high above his head as a bright blue Mustang passed.

“Suck my ass, you old mother fucker!” yelled a thin girl in the passenger seat. Henry kept the sign stretched high above him towards Heaven, registering but ignoring the remark holding even tighter to the flimsy poster board. She had told them to get thicker stocks of paper at the hardware store, but men and their money.

Good for you Henry, stand tall she thought, still recovering from the shout of vulgarity that had just been tossed at him.

*They are lost, Lord. Their parents are lost and now they are lost as well. Please forgive them. They're only babies themselves...*

It was hot today with little if any breeze to speak of. The stale air barely circulating around the intersection was stagnant with carbon monoxide, diesel fumes, and cigarette smoke. Thomas Rank had said that just yesterday lit cigarettes had been flung at him by three different motorists. Glory looked down at her new Ann Taylor dress shirt and matching pleated skirt and hoped to be saved from such an incident today. She thought this morning, just briefly, that perhaps her outfit, although a bit more costly than she could really afford, pale yellow with a subtle yet smart rise weave around the sleeves would add some cheer to the gathering. It was a solemn gathering though, tragic that it had to occur at all. But Glory hoped that the bright, positive hues would inspire a lively rally and bring some spirit into the small group. She bought the clothes just a few days before and was somewhat embarrassed to find that her regular size had increased by two. The paunch around her waistline wasn't visible, not really. The blouse covered it well.

Besides Henry and Thomas, there was Walter Durridge, Lee Banks, Johnson Tober, George Kencke, Larry Hughes, and of course Glory. It was she who had made the phone calls to the others (having to add a bribe of butterscotch bars to Larry). She who had designed the posters with a combination of marker and poster paint, and she who had downloaded the

aborted fetus photos and then had them enlarged at the local Kinko's. The clerk had given her an odd look but the result had held quite an impact. Visible in the prints were the tiny bloated fingers not yet formed, misshapen head with eyes shut as if in deep prayer, and all the blood. So much blood and cartilage and gore. The sides of the canister that the babies had been cast down into showed detailed smears of red, as if they were simply tossed in and slid slowly down the side. Just awful. But she knew in her heart that it was these simply tossed horrific images that would move people when words would not. It was a Godless world, it seemed..

*You do what you have to do, she had thought.*

The lights changed from red to green to yellow then to red again, over and over. Glory thought she heard a honk of encouragement and scanned the passing traffic but was unable to find its origin. *There are good people out there*, she told herself, lips pursed but trying to smile anyway.

Yellow...red. People sat in their vehicles, emotionless, expressionless, like zombies. Radios pounded, some booming so hard as to rattle the metal frames of the cars themselves.

“Save our unborn children!” Glory yelled, by herself. The men would always hold up the signs but rarely if ever joined her in her warrior cries. That's how Glory thought of herself, a warrior for God's unprotected children, a voice of reason in an awful world of sin and waste. She glanced down at her stomach, relieved to see slight looseness in the cotton fabric. *I'll get in shape soon, really make an effort*, she said to herself. The light turned green again and engines came back to life, rumbling and roaring past her, a wave of exhaust washing over her and the men shortly thereafter. Glory coughed.

It had been a little over two months ago that she had met Reynold Carlson. He was new in town, from Detroit she had been told, and now performed janitorial services at the Parrish. He was shy it seemed and Glory felt it her duty to welcome the new member, even though she couldn't recall ever seeing him at any of the church services. Glory attended four services during the week and two on Sunday. The Reverend was especially moving and charismatic during the Sunday services, with lots of theatrics and hand waving and such. She had overheard some of the other parishioners whisper “fire and brimstone” remarks outside in the parking lot on a few occasions, but Glory did her best to ignore them. The Reverend understood that only images of the ever-burning torment of Hell could bring those back who had

strayed from the Flock.

Reynold was in his fifties, stout but pleasant. *What are looks anyway*, Glory had told herself, *nothing but vanity*. She had invited him out for coffee one Sunday after the second service and they had chatted for hours. He was a true holy man, sincere to the core. Glory was charmed and could not help but blush as his fingers had accidentally grazed her arm as he was passing her the saucer that contained the little sealed packets of liquid coffee creamer. The coffees soon turned into weekly lunches and walks on the church grounds. He showed her the poison that he used to kill the rats and other vermin that hid under the worm wooden front steps.

“One squirt and they go to God,” he had said. Glory didn’t really accept the notion that animals went to heaven or even that there was a “separate” heaven for animals and bugs and fish. Heaven was for people. Good, holy people who lived their lives according to the Word. Reynold liked to tease her. He didn’t seem to mind her plain features and simple ideas. Glory felt beautiful when Reynold was around. She had been single for so long that she got shivers when entertaining the idea that he might actually propose to her one day. But that thought seemed so distant, so unattainable. Glory adjusted her skirt slightly.

After a month of spending time together, Reynold had asked Glory over to his apartment for dinner. She hesitated at first. *Stop being silly*, she told herself, its dinner with a good friend. *Stop being such an old maid...*

“Hey Glory!” Larry yelled at her, further down the block, “How much longer are we gonna be here? My grass won’t mow itself!” Glory frowned. She couldn’t understand how men could put time restrictions on preventing murder.

“Just fifteen more minutes, okay hon?” she chirped back, hiding her annoyance at Larry’s lack of perseverance and focus. The light changed to red again and traffic slowed, then stopped.

“Abortion is murder!” Glory yelled to the rows of idling cars. She now held up a child’s plastic baby doll that she had smeared with store-bought strawberry preserves. It was all about shock value these days, unfortunately. A sea of faces peered back at her blankly. Some turned their radios up louder, some even rolled up their windows all together. A little boy of about eight years of age stared at Glory from behind the tinted glass of a mini-van and stuck his middle finger up and waved it in her direction.

“What is wrong with you?” she found herself screaming, stumbling, weaving her way through the mass of SUVs and sedans. “Babies are being killed right now!” she yelled and threw the toy doll at the hood of a brown pick-up truck. The doll slid forward and then off the hood, leaving a pinkish trail of jam behind.

“Glory, hey! Get back on the sidewalk!” It was Thomas this time. He had put down his sign and was walking towards her, but stopped at the curbs edge. “The light’s about to change!”

“All babies should be born, all of them!” Tears were running down her face. “We all come from sin but we can all be forgiven!” Glory raced into the intersection before the light turned green. She was struck from the side by a Jeep and bounced up and over the roll bar before falling face-first onto the pavement, her head just inches from a neglected pothole.

She heard Reynold’s voice “You look so lovely tonight. I haven’t felt this way in a long time with anyone. So lovely, Glory....”

“So lovely,” Glory whispered, blood slowly passing between her lips. Her eyes, also bloodied, turned upwards to the sky.

“Forgive me Lord Jes---” she stuttered, then stopped, her eyes still fixed towards Heaven.

The paramedics arrived seventeen minutes later. Traffic was backed up for miles. A news helicopter circled like a vulture overhead. Yellow tape outlined Glory’s body, her Ann Taylor skirt saturated in crimson. The younger of the two emergency technicians lifted the skirt just slightly, nodded, sighed, and then turned to each other.

“Looks like she was about five weeks along,” he said, and dropped the wet fabric. He then covered Glory in a rough sheer of white plastic and walked back to his truck to do the necessary paperwork.

Cars honked in the distance. Three pigeons fluttered and cooed overhead before lighting on a bus stop bench advertising the weekly specials of a local drycleaner. A swarm of flies had found the jelly that had splattered on the road and were humming as they dined.



"Brooklyn Heights"

Tiffany Chappell

B&W Film

## TRAVELER'S INN

Jaysen Elsky

The travelers wander in  
with their hats and their packs  
and the weight of the world  
in their hair. Some are old  
and remember Woodstock's mud—  
patchouli musk between their toes.  
Some are young and would have been  
Ginberg's Boys—the gold still between  
their thighs. Some mutter, spit, sing  
with phantastic companions. Some just stare  
left with only stone as metaphor.

They stand in line for bad food  
served on prison trays, compartments  
for grease and starch and left over  
scowls from the hairnetted help.  
They grab a paper-thin mat and  
a cheerless blanket and find their  
homes for the night. Play games,  
talk too loudly to cover the snores,  
the shouts, the flatulent symphony  
of one big room of men. They sleep,  
dreaming of doorways that

know their shape and dream of them.

## CHINESE NEW YEAR

Haley Honeysett

Explosions light sky  
Air crackles with intense song  
Bottle rockets soar.

## OLD MAN WITH DREADS

Jaysen Elsky

His hair was nested twigs and  
branch like each piece was a  
history of disasters in ordinary  
life he was not so good at taming.

He wore beads like the end  
of stories; each lock held like  
a dam of coarse dank river  
water which runs its course away.

He tethered it together at the  
base of his noble head where  
the stories slid like snakes down  
a back with the ease of knowing

a life within a hairband's reach.

## TWILIGHT SHOWERS

Haley Honeysett

Tapping from above  
Rhythmic sound echoes inside  
Cold rain falls gently.

## **MUTATIONS**

David Mack

you have given me the drive to be a better father  
your lack of caring piles down deep into my heart  
you feed my hunger to overcome the bickering battles  
to look aside the violent tones, the harsh meaningless words  
it is you that feeds my hunger.  
you were great friends with Erythroxylum coca,  
you surely paid more attention to her than you did child support  
questions trickle from my brainstem to my heart,  
where is the portrayal of manhood,  
we are of your seed and you have not watered us for many years  
this is found to be ridiculous to the men of my family.  
the love and respect that you've lost cannot be held lower than Tahoe  
our tears were once shed, but no more will your seedlings yearn for water  
they have found another source of growth  
one that has allowed us to absorb from our roots and grow strong and tall.  
was it really worth it to lose for a garnished check,  
your blood is slowly dying off,  
eventually a new strain of seeds will grow yielding the best of fruit  
your negligence has forced positive mutations to occur  
and for this I thank you,  
for it was you who fed my hunger.



"Remembering"

Jack III

Ink Drawing

# STRANDED

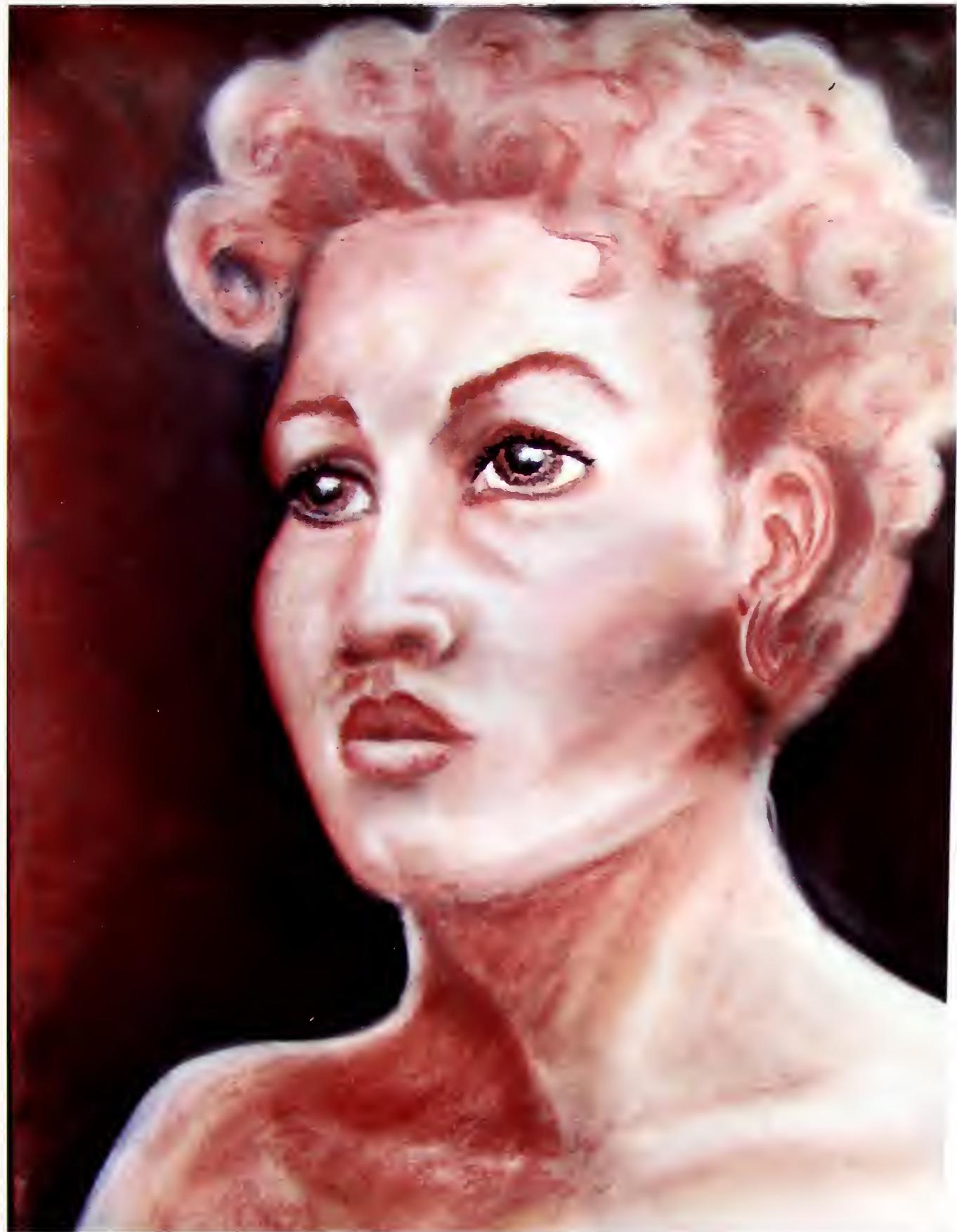
Erica Diaz

No words for this:  
That which is and isn't mine  
You pad softly through my room  
I watch you move with dancer's grace.  
Your arms sway at your side  
As palms blown lazily through a tropical night  
Warm water wind makes love to their trunks  
Sea breezes fondle their fronds  
You curl your fingers nervously as you move  
Through the shadows  
Breath trembling with each step you take.  
For just one moment  
For just this moment let me be yours  
Let me worship at the base of these palms  
Allow me a moment of childish abandon  
Allow my eyes to dance at your collarbones  
May I, just for tonight dear, lose myself  
Sliding down the slope of your bicep?  
Might I sink softly into the dip of your elbow,  
To let the tides of your forearm ebb and flow as you walk?  
On this desert isle  
Your voice is my food.  
Your eyes are my water  
Your strength now my shelter  
Tonight and forever, my treasure, I am  
Shipwrecked in your palms  
Capsized in your arms

## SELF IMAGE

Sheena Fernandez

We've just met never even spoke a word  
It was "like" at first sight.  
Then from across the room  
Walked your better half  
So quickly disappeared  
The fantasy I was quickly forming  
Damn there went another one  
Then I started to analyze  
Why would you pick someone like "her"  
Over someone like me  
In your opinion  
Am I less than her  
Because I'm more than her  
Or is it 'cause there's more of me than her  
It's just more of me to love  
Or am I just not worth  
The extra effort  
A man's view of beauty  
Has slowly killed the me I see  
My reflection is no longer  
Beautiful  
Unless it's covered up by Clairol  
Lashes extended by Max factor  
Ups enhanced by colors man made  
So I must expose myself  
And lessen myself  
From the Cuban Queen I am.  
To make myself acceptable.  
Yet even still I have a negative  
Self image  
I still can't fit  
Into the more beauty  
So I'll fight the fight  
Against the bottle blondes  
And the artificial beauties  
That society has deemed better  
Than me



"Aztec Lady"

Carla Schuchman

Pastels

## **TAKING ADVANTAGE**

Howard Christie

Only seventeen I was. Ripe, ready to be picked and I thought I was going to conquer the world. With my Superman mentality I never knew there was someone out there ready and waiting in the crevices of their intentions to pick me from the tree.

Armed with sex appeal, fair skinned, full breasts, a body that would send any man to the moon, she unleashed her venom. A venom that poisoned what little sense I had left in my head. The only sense that remained throbbed at her utter presence. Could not resist, could not free myself from her web. She paralyzed me in an instant and used me as if I were dignity. That moment felt like the peak of my existence but I never knew that Superman in me was really Clark Kent.

# WHO AM I?

Sarah McCulloch

A woman, slightly hunched over, silver hair blowing in the wind  
Its curly brittle ends once full of youth  
A stranger, yet familiar in a Grandma-like way  
This woman, like a rose once so vibrant whose beauty has now faded, passes me by  
Its sweet scent still very much alive, its lifespan slipping away

Who am I? A gentle question has a harsh grip on my soul  
An infant staring up into the green leaves on the tree hovering above my crib  
A young child getting my sunflower-colored hair braided  
Prancing through the fields, tall strands of grass forming a tunnel through which I run  
Who am I? Three soft syllables play on my heart's strings

An awkward pimple-faced 13 year old, uncertain of my newly found sexuality  
Intense feelings have broken the comfortable layer of superficiality  
Still very much a child, yet the world follows a different clock, ticking away  
A myriad of decisions, the daunting unknown, adulthood looms  
Moments pass me by, yet a part of me is left behind

A surgical mask covering my face, gloves shield my hands  
Staring ahead, eyes, lifeless, stare back at me, I cannot breathe  
Psychology, still a science, my mind enthralled, my heart sleeps on  
Ah, the lingering question remains, its sound echoing off the walls of the world  
Every letter breathes an intense longing into my entity: Who am I?

Looking up, the woman turns, her eyes sparkling as if withholding a secret  
Blue, shimmering eyes, much like my own, a smile creeps onto her lips  
Her hand, adorned with elegant wrinkles, slips out of her pocket, waving a hello  
A pen holding onto her shirt for dear life, a book tucked under her armpit  
Perhaps the answer will reach my conscious before old age: Who am I?



"Fantasy"

Tiffany Chappell

Chalk

## OUTLINES

Kimberley Gibbons

Through the blanket of black darkness  
I can see them  
The moonlight smoothes its fingers over them  
I walk the dew drops of the midnight gleam and  
Bless the grass with light  
A million fairies light my path with the glow  
Of their mushroom lanterns

Each step takes me deeper into the pages of the past  
Flipping back to my childhood, I approach the swing and sit on it  
I'm surprised to see even after years past I still feel like home here  
The hills surrounding me, the songs of the crickets  
And the music of the stream in the distance  
I wrap my hand around the iron chains  
And swing into freedom as I feel the rush of air over my body  
And the playground's sand between my toes

Stuck in between the pages of womanhood  
I struggle to find my next chapter—  
The next page is still blank  
But I do not fear tomorrow  
Because tonight I see the outlines  
Of the future and the past  
Somehow they'll come together and last



"My Creation"

Charles Bowles

Computer Graphic

## **GUNS AND TANKS**

Weston Jean

He plays a war game  
With puns and no strategy  
He just lines them up  
And watches them fall  
Battlefield painted in blood  
What's left is death is all  
No Gains of Stature or ranks  
Just more games of guns and tanks  
He cuts the fabric of freedom  
As he plays with the fiddle of life  
He toys with the presence of death  
As he dangles us over the knife  
No time for laughter  
At any kind of games or pranks  
Just more shots from guns and tanks  
He plays a war game  
That's fueled by lies  
Pretending his method is right  
Makes it easier to ignore the cries  
As he continues to line them up  
To watch them fall  
For in this game there are no blanks  
Just more bloodshed from guns and tanks.

## AN AFRICAN TALE

Aurelie Verne

The cute little boy was about seven years old.  
He was, from what I heard, the cutest child ever.  
He seemed like such a kind kid, black, good looking, bold,  
Appeared in good health, if you didn't know better.

Mewanda loved life, school, playing with his buddies,  
Walked barefoot, and always had a smile on his face  
Never owned a bike, never even saw groceries  
He was happy, why would he think of better place?

He wasn't old enough to hang out with his dad  
So had to stay in the village with his mother.  
At times she didn't let him play, that made him mad,  
But how could one stay mad when they don't know anger?

Mewanda was ill. How atrocious for a kid!  
He still lived in complete and immense happiness  
His family knew he was dying, even he did.  
Can you believe he never showed any sadness?

The young boy had only two regrets when he died,  
Being too young to go hunting with his father,  
And too weak to comfort his mother as she cried.  
He smiled at them and said: "I'll see you guys later."

Even if I've never known or even seen him  
Mewanda became such a great inspiration  
Because when I dare to complain, chances are slim  
That the amazing kid ever asked for compassing.

We, the people in the rich, trouble-free countries  
Don't often realize how fortunate we all are  
We cry, yell, and get upset for futilities,  
When kids in the world have no shoes and never fall.

# FEATURED ARTIST

Photo by Johnny Louis



## “Kapone

Is Ill Da Bad Guy,”

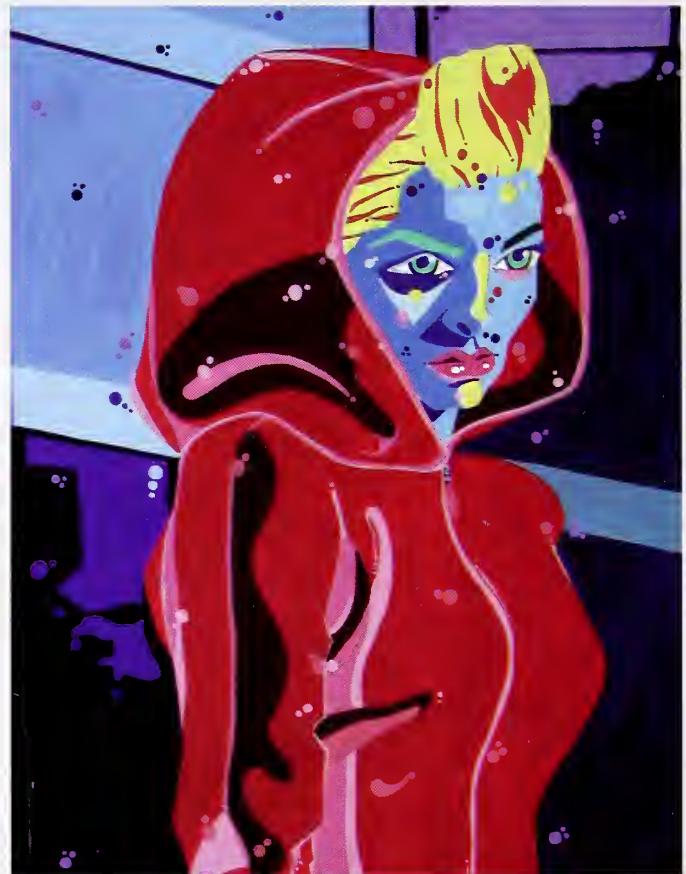
otherwise known as “Kiill,” whose real name we’ll keep anonymous, had crayons in his hand since he can remember. “I used to color and make trouble,” Kiill boasts about his childhood. He always knew he had talent and developed his prominent style in ’94 starting with drawings of buildings in a hard edge style. Kiill likes using pens, pencils, ink and acrylic paints while perfecting his skills using a digital camera. He prefers hands on art but dislikes sculpting.

The name “Kapone” came from an old friend of his that used to tag the name. Kiill quickly made it his own adding to it, “Is Ill Da Bad Guy.” He attributes his style to artists like Picasso and Dali, his love for abstract art, comic books and the style of graffiti art. “I like playing with different colors and distorting the image a little bit,” he said. Not only does his creative side reflect in his artwork, but Kiill also maintains his own website, raps, attends fashion shows and works for the street magazine *Ego-Miami* as a photographer. “I take pictures of people having fun on South Beach and in the clubs.” Kiill is also enrolled part time at BCC and works full time promoting his work along with the work of other graffiti artists.

Kiill will be launching his own clothing line June 1 of this year. “For now it’s going to be t-shirts, then I’ll expand.” His love of graffiti art prompted him to start his graffiti style paintings and within the next 10 years, he hopes to own an art gallery which will specifically feature upcoming graffiti artists like himself. “Graffiti art is dope,” said Kiill, “and it does not get the recognition it should, so I want to put it out there.”

“Kapone Is Ill Da Bad Guy” does not keep a resume and acts spontaneously while painting and the like. It can take up to two weeks to create one of his “masterpieces” and Kiill’s favorite thing to paint is women’s curves. Much of his artwork is featured in *P’an Ku* and on his website: his photography in *Ego-Miami*. To check out more of “Kiill’s” stuff visit his website at [kaponeisill.com](http://kaponeisill.com)

Interview by Maria Matienzo



**“Kiill Da Bad Guy”**



## Adriana Uribe



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Photo by Johnny Louis

NYU or FAU in graphic design, then a master's, and dreams of owning her own graphic design company.

Despite her love for the arts, Adriana merely started experimenting with photography and sculpting only one-and-a-half years ago. Her eye for detail and unique sense of style allows her to create what she wants. "I just get these ideas in my head and want to photograph them," she said. Adriana mostly photographs herself and her sister because it can take up to 10 hours for one photo shoot, which generates 300 pictures, and not many people she knows have the time or patience to do what she wants. "Make-up and costume can easily take five to six hours."

Adriana uses the spare room in her house as her studio but also takes photographs at outdoor locations. When the photograph of the Angel and Devil titled "Controversy" was selected to appear in the Fall 2004 edition of *P'an Ku*, Adriana was shocked. "I was not expecting anything to get chosen! It was a big surprise."

Adriana also does promotional work and is a part time wedding photographer. She plans on contributing to *P'an Ku* until she graduates in May 2006.

Interview by Maria Matienzo

## **JUST KEEPIN' IT REAL**

Moriah Chambers-Jordan

While ya'll are out there looking for land  
People are getting suppressed  
People are getting pushed in the sand  
While the crook cop beats down the innocent man  
Women get raped  
And children get stabbed  
The police give unnecessary, tickets to jay-walkers  
While elementary children are followed by strangers  
And by shockers  
Jail will not help the war on crime  
Just to frustrate the man  
Not to educate the mind  
Behind the bars the soul does lie  
And you're still frustrated  
Because you had to do unnecessary time  
While the "real" criminals are running the streets  
Killing the police  
They lock you up because you're just puffin' on some trees  
Crook cops and racial peers  
This is who decides your destiny  
What you truly fear  
Only in America do the Natives have no say  
And barely have a share  
What makes America so great?  
Is it just faith or are we just scared  
Tempted to see next  
What Bush will throw in the air?



"The Man"

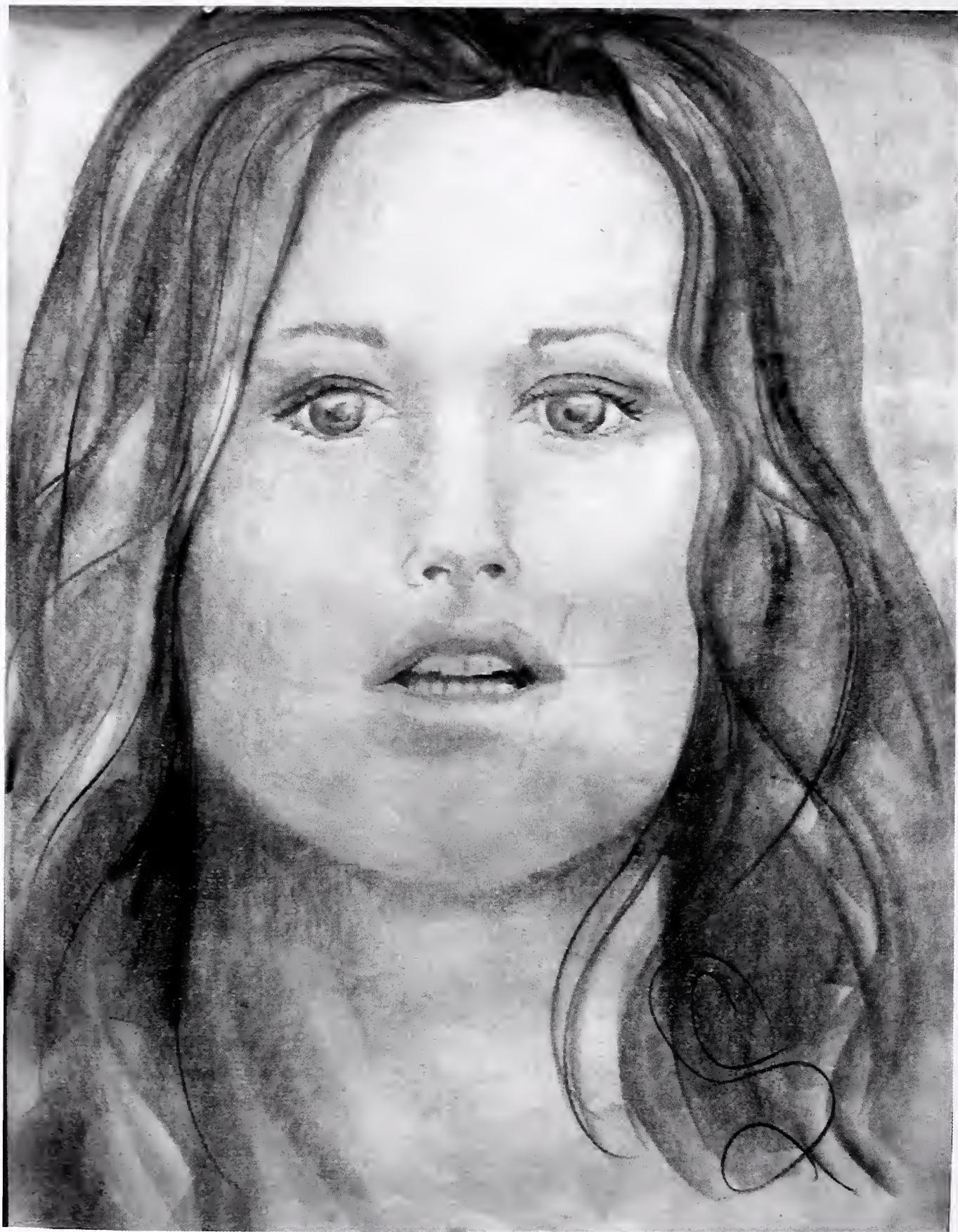
Theresa Neumann

Solarization

## ""TENTATIVE TITLE""

Sari Canavan

I seem to have outgrown my life  
Like a shoe that no longer fits  
There is no room to breathe  
It binds my limbs  
Confines my soul  
There is no growth to come  
Without a change  
I must get out  
Move on  
New places and new people  
A change of path is in order  
If not I will remain  
Stuck in this place  
Which has closed in upon me  
Existence is pointless  
When there is no personal growth  
There is so much potential  
But the energy is held in  
With no room for release  
Swallowed down  
Deep within  
Pushed to the back of my being  
So now I venture on this journey  
With winding road and warped scenery  
To find an end to a means  
To find reason in my being  
But first  
I need new shoes



"suzanne"

Carla Schuchman

charcoal

## MY BETTER JUDGMENT

Marines Alvarez

I guess I was expected to wilt  
    Eat the Fruit of Sin  
And let it take the place of a little girl's faith  
    I was given this jaded heart  
    And expected to wear it under my sleeve  
They gave me all the appropriately cynical answers  
    And all the rationale against you  
    I let myself have all the hurt  
Enough to make it obvious that heaven is too noble a solution  
    Enough loss to suspect and doubt  
    (Two misingredients in faith)  
    I was the girl in the great garden  
Who felt the Creator's eyes on a naked body  
    Soiled by sin  
    I was the one who wanted to know it all  
The world sees all the indications of a Godless creature

And yet

But still

Even then

In my muddied hands I hold my mustard seed  
    It's grown  
My eyes can't help but lift towards heaven  
    And laugh at those too blind to see it  
    You believe this God  
    They say  
    *Against your better judgment*

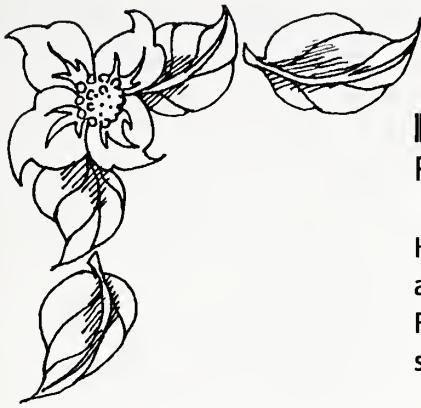
My Best Judgment is my best reason to believe  
Where did my own selfish, crusted, stupid judgment lead me  
    I was the girl in the lushness of a perfect garden  
    Who couldn't see towering trees of sweet Divinity  
Who reached out to touch the only one she couldn't have  
    The only one that could do her harm—  
    The Fruit of My Better Judgment  
    The Fruit named My Judgment is Better  
And sometimes I feel that bitter taste left in my mouth  
    And I laugh again  
And let my feet lead me to the tree of Redemption



"Marine Ensemble"

Wendy Leuder

Photography



## FOR FUTURE RECOLLECTIONS

Rebecca Faust

He put the Taj Mahal in my hands,  
an entire realm in my palms.  
Fleetingly simple,  
studied: complex.

None had ever given me  
flowers, keepsakes, cards-  
he gave me a symbol  
of timeless devotion.

Built for perpetual passion  
that was a true love-match,  
had it been arranged,  
would it have been as real?

How could I trust someone  
to pick for me true love?  
He says to comprehend her family,  
and thus foresee the future wife.

Intricate carving and luxurious jewels-  
thousands of dialects and cultures  
come together to form a single sculpture.

His scent of pungent spices burns  
my simple American palate.  
Instead of my everyday jeans,  
he wants to see a silken sari  
beside my blue eyes and blond hair.

Glance at the box across the room-  
air fills with jingles of ankle bells and bangles,  
mysteries of linen-swathed women,  
strains of the sitar and flute.

I memorize: bronzed skin next to pale,  
vegetarian versus meat,  
exotic compared to industrial.

One precious form  
embodies beloved departed;  
remembered union past.

## COMING TO TERMS: STILL

Susan Sanders

"There was a time when we expected nothing of our children but obedience, as opposed to the present, when we expect everything of them but obedience"

Anatole Broyard

Ask any woman over the age of 40 about her relationship with her mother and her response may be preceded by a deep sigh. If she says it is "good" or "alright", there will almost always be a "but . . ." tagging reluctantly along. Disappointment and disillusionment with our mothers typically begins sometime in the confusing mist of adolescence. Marriage and family are what many girls dream and fantasize about in the young years of imaginative play. This dream only gains prominence in the development of a girl's self esteem as she plunders through puberty. Sadly, our eyes open to the realization that our mothers are not living up to the ideals cemented in our thoughts.

Mothers are to be inspirational, guiding lights . . . ever changing and evolving as their children grow. It was with embarrassment and anger that I noticed my mother was none of those things. I vowed to be nothing like her. She was drab and her life was as unglamorous as she was. No, I would not be like her.

Nevertheless, I am her daughter. I have difficulty thinking of myself in those terms. I am a wife, a mother, a friend, and a woman. I am a daughter on only the most superficial level. If my mother needs help, I respond in a detached, perfunctory manner – a reflection of the way she raised me. I feel no commitment on an emotional level to do things for her that I don't want to do.

I am not my mother, but we must both struggle through the maze of who we are versus who others want us to be. Family dynamics fall into fixed patterns that we ridiculously repeat because

breaking patterns requires a determination we can't consistently draw upon. It is difficult to reconcile the dream I had of my future self while incorporating the reality of my current day.

So the challenge continues daily to look within myself to find that inspirational guiding light so that I might be ever changing and evolving as my various roles unfold along the time line. I find myself looking to my mother, and ironically - she does inspire me, she still inspires me to be nothing like her. So when I feel a tendency to take the easy road, even though it is the wrong road, I fight and fight for the courage to change, the courage to look for newness and exhilaration in admirable forms. Sometimes in the fight I can sense how impossible this courage would have been for my mother. I can sense her contentment to sit on the sidelines where it is safe from conflict and confrontation.

There are no guidebooks to help me become a better daughter. But then, I wouldn't buy one if there were. It is no trick really to be a better daughter. What is it that follows the "but . . ." that so many women add on when speaking of the relationship with their mothers? Stories and stories of how to get along with Mom all start and end with being submissive. Submissive daughters are good daughters.

My mother understands the simplicity of obedience, embraces simplicity in her relationships. So my childhood habit of obedience – what I view as submission - is now all we have between us. The semantics of the two words brings valuable insight to our struggle to get along.

I wanted more with my daughter, and I have it. I have an emotionally charged connection with her that is built on mutual respect and love. For me, that beats obedience every time.

## PART I: INDIGO LETTERS

Erica Diaz

A powder blue line, one quarter of an inch in length, dangling as a sentence fragment in a tiny egg shape on a synthetic polymer stick: that is how you announced your arrival, that is how I knew you were coming. I find it fascinating how a tiny blue line can carry with it the weight of the universe in the right context. At other times it is lost: a brush stroke under-appreciated in the grander scheme of the masterpiece or perhaps a single perfect note hidden within the cacophony. I stared at that line for an eternity, and realized that a part of me already knew. The part of me that knew, as a child, how to kiss boo-boos all better; she knew you were there. That part of me woke up in the middle of the night with a fire in her belly that would not be ignored. That part of me felt a sense of accomplishment at that line. That line was my Pyramid at Giza. The Great Wall of China was contained there, in simple chemical reactions on a stick sitting idly on an unfinished bathroom counter.

Mindless math leads me to believe that you're not even the size of a grain of rice yet. Still, I can't help but wonder if you'll be a poet laureate, or maybe an indy rock star as your father had so aspired. As I lean on the full-length mirror that backs the door I wonder if you'll have his eye for aesthetics. I myself had aspired to take the kinds of photos he does, framed perfectly, always interesting in the sort of constructive deconstructivism. I'm allergic to the developing agents and my photos had always seemed like an attempt at creativity more so than a stroke of nonchalant genius like his. I laugh. I have dreams for you already, precious one. I have dreams for you already.

❖❖❖❖❖

I told your father you were coming. He cried and laughed and hugged me. He kissed my tummy where he thought you would be sitting. I didn't have the heart to tell him that at this point you were far lower on the landscaping. He's sleeping beside me now. I look at him, his features so striking. He's beautiful, you know, in a way that Americans have no word for. My people, your

people, would say "ermosa": darkly beautiful, exotically beautiful, brooding and preening in a corner watching your every move beautiful. He is Cuban and Chinese and gloriously handsome. You will be delicious to look at, no doubt. I wonder if you'll have his eyes. I wonder if they'll be narrow and full of sadness even when you're laughing. I wonder if you'll have his passion and intensity. Perhaps you'll have my mouth and your lips will be full and pouty. You're doomed to have a button nose, sweetling, and will be short I'm sorry to say... but your skin will be dark, your eyes will be deep, and your heart will be soft.

I smile now thinking of the way that I look at your father all awash in azure half-light. I know I love this man. I melt at his smile. I melt at his scent. I just melt. I know that in years to come that some man, woman will look at you that way. Some day, someone will take comfort in your scent, someone's heart will break every time you smile. I pray that you can be a softer sin.

❖❖❖❖❖

Today, you were named. If you're a little girl, you will be Starly-Blue. It would be good if you were a girl, you'd have wonderful cousins to play with who won't be much older than you. Your cousin Skylynn would appreciate a playmate.

Your father and I met as twelve year olds, on a warm October night, under a blanket of stars. The boy down the street introduced us and we talked for hours and have been in love ever since. We've always loved stars, given star-related gifts, you were conceived at the beach under the stars... but maybe I should wait till you're older to explain that one... in any event naming you Starly seemed to fit.

If you're a boy your name will be Julian. It means "youthful" and is very much a wish your father and I have for you. We wish for you to grow old but never up. However cliché that is, it's an honest heartfelt wish. I tried "growing up" for about two years there. I couldn't appreciate the canary hibiscus or the way that violets swirl between blue and purple anymore.

Growing up is, in essence, the slaughter of imagination and appreciation of beauty.

If you are a boy, we have a gift for you when you're born. After you're born your father will pull you close and hug you then he will put you on my chest. I will sing "Hey Jude" to you and let you listen to my heartbeat and my voice. "Hey Jude" will be your lullaby and when you hear it, even as an adult, you will know that you were loved deeply, fiercely, by your parents.

If you're a girl, well, I'm sure we'll come up with a song for you too... but I don't think the Beatles wrote one about a girl named Starly. Closest they came was "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and we're not singing you a lullaby about an acid trip. Sorry.



I've been sick the past few days. You seem to take after me thus far. Mom says it serves me right for almost killing her when I was your age. She calls it cosmic retribution. I call it one hell of a crash diet.

I've lost eighteen lbs. in the past week and a half. I forgive you, though. I'm sure the nutrition is helping you grow strong like your father, and intelligent like me.

The doctor with the glacier eyes told me that there's something wrong. He thinks, because of my scoliosis and blood disorder, that you and I should go our separate ways. They

don't understand. My entire life I've lived for someone else, you have been my only dream for myself and I can't let that go.

Mom says I should, that there will be more time for all this when I get older and stronger. I think what she's trying to say is that when I'm thinner and the strain on my spine isn't so heavy.

Tell me Julian - and yes, you are Julian; so sayeth the doctors - tell me how to make a choice between myself, and you who I love so much. I obviously need to do what's best for me physically but I can do bed rest for a while. I need to try at least.



Twenty more lbs. lost in the last two weeks, Julian. I'm starting to lose control of basic body functions. It's not easy to play off at my age.

Incontinence is for the very old or very young. The young woman with cherubic cheeks and perfectly arched eyebrows is not allowed to be weak like this.

The doctors say it's normal with my disorder. So is the fainting.

Julian, you're pushing me to the limits. Are you testing me, I wonder? Trying to see if I am strong enough to be your mother? It's ok, I understand. If I were you I'd want to know these things too. I'm not angry with you or anything, but I'd really appreciate it if you'd stop.



I got called back to the office early this morning. Dr. Ice-chip wanted to do some more tests. So I'm sitting here in the waiting room staring at the walls. I will never understand the color scheme in these places. The walls here are dusty cadet blue. It would have a French colonial feel if it wasn't bordered in this muted crimson. It looks like dried blood. How horrible. The last thing anyone wants before an office visit is the idea of blood emblazoned into their mind, consciously or otherwise.



I need to choose now. I need you to help me choose. You will die either way. There's no saving you now. So it's up to you little one. Talk to me, speak to me. I feel like I've just asked someone on death row to choose their method. If I wait it out and let you leave of your own volition it will be long and painful. If I choose to have the abortion it will be quicker for us both. The choice seems so cut and dry for everyone else but this isn't about them, is it? This is between you and I. So what do we do, Julian? Do we just suffer the pain and let it all drag out, or end it quickly? Nevermind.

I know what I need to do. This will be my last letter to you, Julian. Know that I love you. Know that after all of this is said and done, you will not be forgotten.



## PART III: THE PROCEDURE

They told me I couldn't drive myself. It's ok I wasn't planning on it. I thought the three of us needed to be here, you and I are obviously a packaged deal. I wanted your father to drive, but I never expected him to decide that he wanted to be in the room with me when it all happens. This is terrifying to say the least and I don't want to think about what's going to happen so I stare at those walls again, cadet blue bordered in that dried blood color. The patch of wall to my left is smudged with little fingerprints and I can't help but wonder how many other women have sat in this exact chair staring at these exact smudges waiting ... just waiting.

I'm reminded suddenly of the film Shawshank Redemption. Brooks carved his name into the wall before he died, and Red did the same but chose life. I wonder if these smudges belong to those women, some choosing life, some choosing death, but all leaving their mark. I wipe some eye makeup away from the underside of my eyelids and smudge it there on the wailing wall, my mark the darkest of them all.

Christopher, your father, handles the paperwork for us. I know this because he every now and again asks me questions about whether I've had the mumps and what I'm allergic to and tells me to sign and initial things that I don't bother to read. I don't really care, nor dare, to go over these forms.

We're called in to the back office and sat in a counseling room. I'm asked if I'm doing this of my own free will. Now that's a doozy of a question. Do I want to do this? No, not particularly. Do I really have a choice? No. It's either this, or potential death for us both. Not a pretty death either, one of those slow, painful, inner hemorrhaging deaths. So while the honest answer to that question is "no" I just lower my head and say "yes". Chris squeezes my hand lovingly. A hundred more times the same question, they make me guess and second guess and third guess and un-guess and re-guess. I hate them for that.

To another room now, this one filled with big leather chairs and sofas. If I wasn't in the middle of an abortion clinic I'd say it looked like quite a handsome and comfortable study. Unfortunately

I'm all too aware of where I am, and of the mats placed on the cushions of these chairs. They're to catch blood.

My paper gown is itchy and an unflattering shade of pink. Everything here is colored in such muted tones. I feel like I'm at a funeral parlor, everything looks caked in years of dust. The blues have no sparkle, the white isn't crisp, this pink seems so sun-faded; but it's my pink, my paper gown, my funeral parlor with the dirty white.

Still a third room, and this will be the last one I visit. I can tell. The walls here are grimy yellow, like bathroom tiles covered in soap scum. The floor tiles match perfectly and I can't possibly imagine why any designer would do that. In the center of this room is the chair that I dread. Relatively flat, to be honest it's more like a table with stirrups. I'm in it and Chris is in a chair beside me. A button pushed somewhere by someone sends the table angling itself until my head is aimed at the floor.

Nobody is talking to me, nobody but the poster taped to the ceiling. It's a ballerina in mid leap and it declares to me "You can Fly!" I can't help but notice it's been taped up there a million times and fallen a million more. One wonders about the symbolism in that. I can see the old pieces of tape dancing at the borders of the poster. I hate the poster. It's a lying poster.

I feel a prick in my arm and snarl at the nurse for not having told me she was going to inject me, but Chris just kisses my cheek and says that she did tell me. This sedative makes me woozy and the ballerina starts doing leaps across the tiled ceiling while I'm being probed.

*"Internal ultrasound to find the fetus"* the doctor says and I'm not sure who he's talking to.

*"Julian."* Chris corrects him. *"His name is Julian."* I grumble mostly because I haven't the foggiest clue what else to do. My eyes close of their own accord and I zone in and out.

*"Are you sure about this? Once we begin the procedure we can't stop."*

I just nod but inside I'm wondering about the legalities of asking someone that question when they're already sedated. My hearing gets all wooshy with the sound of the water in my head. *"...series of rods inserted in the cervix to dilate..."*

**woosh**

and then his voice in my ear, soft:

*"I'm sorry baby. I'm so sorry. It'll be ok though, I -"*  
**woosh**

I open my eyes to look up at him. He's gone ghost white, poor boy. I reach my hand out to comfort him, and pet the side of his face as much as I can but these damned drugs won't let me move the way I want to. I'm only half aware of what's going on down at the other end of the table. I know they're "inserting rods" into my cervix but I feel nothing at this point.

"...almost to the bigger ones now. These you might -"

**woosh**

My back arches even though I didn't tell it to. This pain is insane. It's sharp, like being stabbed from the inside to deeper inside. Chris whispers in my ear, he's singing "Hey Jude" as softly as he can but I can hear the tears in his voice.

The nurses hold me down.

"you need to stay still or you'll end up perforating the uterus!"

**woosh**

I hear buzzing, humming, and the strange sucking noise like when I go to the dentists and he vacuums your spit for you. The pain just will not quit and I make a note that should this happen again I'm going to ask for a stronger sedative.

Woosh

"Baby open your eyes. It's over. Come on babe... I need you... come on. Please?"

I obey. But I obey the sorrow and fear in Chris's voice, not Chris himself.

The table pushes me upright and nurses grab my wrists to help me up while Chris wraps an arm about my hips to steady me.

My beautiful Julian is gone, tossed away in some container marked "Biohazard"

I feel helpless and dizzy and empty.

Not emotionally empty. Physically empty. So this is how peanut butter jars feel right before you throw them away. I look at Chris and wonder if he'll be throwing me away now.

We're back in the study before I realize that I'd been made to walk there, and I'm in one of those grand leather chairs, bare butt pressed to a glorified maxi pad. How sexy I must be at this

moment. The sedative is wearing off quickly. On the table next to me are my clothes, shoes, and a "sanitary napkin" courtesy of the staff. I'm told I can leave once I can walk on my own. The nurse is gone, she closed the door behind her. I never saw her, or any other nurse again - such a caring and involved group of employees.

Chris, poor Chris, is crying. He's wriggled into the chair with me and wrapped himself around me, my back pressed to his chest, I lean on him like a giant living lounge

chair. He's my support, my rock and salvation right now. He is pure, always has been pure. He makes no sound, weeping only in tears that fall steadily onto my forehead.

I don't wipe them away. I don't mind this baptism.

I close my eyes and let his tears cleanse me of my sins - cleanse us both.

We say nothing on the drive home.

We say nothing when I rush to the bathroom to throw up. He holds my hair and rubs my back as he should. He plays his role without question. I wonder if it's the Chinese part of him that feels the need to fulfill some perceived duty.

We say nothing over the pseudo-dinner we have when I finally wake up from my nap.

We say nothing as we watch T.V.

We say nothing as we curl up in bed hoping to dream away the day.

We say nothing, but when he thinks I'm fast asleep he rubs my tummy and cries. He apologizes to me, and to Julian, and to everyone. In his mind it is all somehow his fault. I dare not interrupt his confession to my navel. His tears fill it up like a tiny bowl of holy water and as I'm left contemplating the exact shade of blue filtering in from the moon, he sings "Hey Jude" softly, clinging to my hips as a child.

WRITES OF SPRING





"Reflections"

Delight Burke

BGW Photography

## MIRROR LAKE

Kim Nguyen

There  
the first person who  
understood  
my broken English  
firewood-chop sound-like

there  
no translation needed

there  
he could guess  
what I tried to say  
for some time,  
a Vietnamese head-nod  
meant yes  
but other times, no

there  
we adults  
played a spelling-game  
when incorrect, stood up  
otherwise, sat free

there  
the only teacher  
always waiting  
at the classroom door  
welcomed his students back  
who knelt at my table  
expounding the "future-perfect,"  
who still reads  
my fragment verses



"Forgotten Land"

Linda Pedraza

B&W Photography



"Portrait #1"

Deivy Amaya

Silver Gelatin Print

# THE DARK MISTRESS

Jonathan Adda

**T**he mind's power is truly extraordinary. The tale I'm about to tell is one so unbelievable that many have called me a fool, yet it is true. It cannot be merely explained as the ranting of a lunatic, yet to understand this story requires one to expose himself to insanity.

When I was a child I often found myself playing alone. I was always a loner, preferring to explore wooded areas rather than play tedious child games like hide and go seek. I always felt more aware of my surroundings than other children. I felt more connected to earth and her rhythms. As a result I was often times ostracized by the other children around me. Their taunts and mocking ways only served to further push me away as I started to believe that I was different from them. Not different like you'd assume any child would say they are different, but different in the way that I believed I was a magical creature. A creature capable of fantastic things one would only read about. I sought out knowledge of the occult to reinforce this belief but never found anything of substance. About the time I entered my fourteenth year my interests changed to the more mundane ones of common boys, mainly I started caring more about girls than my so-called powers and the occult.

While as a teenager I was drawn away from my previous life, I always felt a connection. So stunted was my life because of my lonely childhood that I had a difficult time with girls. They made me feel silly and unwanted, they were cruel to me, yet I could not stop thinking about them. All I wanted was to know how the other boys felt, how it was to have someone whose hand you hold, whose lips you kiss. I could not understand at the time that I was just too different

for a common girl to truly appreciate me for who I was, that she would

be subject to same ridicules, the same whims and fancies which young adults are so wont to live by. I turned inwards once again, but now I felt worse

than ever, the knowledge of wisdom informing me that I was no more special, no more powerful than anyone else I knew. The only difference between me and them was that I was an outcast in their world. I was that piece of the puzzle that finds its way into the wrong box so as to confuse the player, always standing out, never truly fitting in.

You see from the time I had finished high school, there was only one woman I truly loved. She always wore the same dark flowing dress. She was breath taking, and she held a power over me like no other. I was always hypnotized by her, and she never left my side. I did what I could to hide her presence, but my first wife resented her nonetheless. She was always there with us, intrusive and quietly obnoxious. Her power over me was intoxicating, as much as I wanted her to leave, I couldn't stand not being with her, not having her around me, I felt trapped, yet I loved the feeling. A caged animal seeks out freedom, a prisoner inevitably tries to escape his cell, but not I. I adored her, loved her without compromise.

My aloofness led to difficulties at work and I found myself moving from job to job. She was mostly responsible for this too of course, but I still found a way to forgive her. By the fourth year of our marriage, my wife and I barely acknowledged each other's presence. I did not want to argue, didn't care to argue, and she did not want to see her failure, that being me. I pitied her, she had always dreamed of raising a family, she had a naïve quality to her that led her to believe that all people mean good. This discomfort at home bade me to seek out my mistress more intensely, I starved for her attention. She always came to me though, she would come in my house and sit on the armrest of the sofa next to me, wrapping me up in her arms, her darkness at once intoxicating me

and poisoning me. I knew she was no more than common poison, yet I was helpless to

stop myself from seeking her comfort. I relished her embrace, she was all I needed, all I wanted. When the divorce

*"A caged animal seeks out freedom, a prisoner inevitably tries to escape his cell, but not I. I adored her, loved her without compromise."*

finally came, she was the only one that gave me the solace I wanted. Her quiet resolve led me down a dangerous path.

My second marriage was nothing more than a marriage of convenience, although it introduced me to a cherished friend and companion, a cat which she had named Belvedere. My second wife, like me, was an introvert and was not much for conversation. She had been running away from life somewhere else and needed to start anew. I offered to marry her over drinks at a tavern the night we met and she accepted. She met my mistress that night too, but said nothing of her presence. We wed the following day and consummated the marriage that night. One of the conditions I set forth to her before she accepted my marriage proposal was that she was to never turn down my carnal desires. The fact that she accepted such a condition spoke to the horrors she was leaving behind, perceived or not. This marriage of convenience was not to last however, a fact which I was certainly aware of from the beginning. It would seem that my many nights of drunken debauchery finally drove my second wife to leave me in the middle of the night as it turns out. I never saw her again, but she left Belvedere. He, unlike my wife, had grown very fond of my mistress. He enjoyed her visits as they provided him my lap to sit on for long hours of undisturbed rest. Cats sleep anywhere from eighteen to twenty-two hours per day, Belvedere spent the better part of those hours on my lap on many days.

I resolved not to marry again, not to destroy another woman's heart and soul ever again. I could now devote my full attention to my mistress and she loved every second of it. Work was hard to come by and I took great care to hide my past employment failures. Finally, I found work I enjoyed. As I took on more responsibility at work, my mistress came to see me less and less. Belvedere was probably not too pleased either, but he still visited me when he had the chance. A long time passed and I realized I had not seen her at all. Until that day, that fateful day which I am about to tell you of.

You see I worked in a factory. There were many belts and conveyors in this factory, used to carry out materials here and there in

various states of assembly. My job was to make sure these conveyors were in proper working order. Well, that day something went wrong and I was blamed. I had not performed the necessary maintenance on one such conveyor and it snapped, not only destroying thousands of dollars of equipment, but also smashing into someone as it swung across like a pendulum of death, sending their lifeless body careening into a solid brick wall. I found myself sitting in my chair at home unemployed before lunch time. My mistress came to me that day and it was then I realized that she was the poison that had been holding me down, that she'd been robbing me of my life for so many years. I resolved to kill her then, but not later, I resolved to commit the crime right then and there.

So as not to alarm her of my plans, I slouched into my chair and let her wrap her arms around me once more. Knowing what I was about to do, I let myself melt into her arms one last time. I asked her to follow me to the attic to show her something that I'd been working on for her. She followed me silently up the stairs into the attic. As I opened the door and stepped into the dark room, I reached on the wall for my axe and in one swift blow I swung around and screamed like an enraged beast as I cleaved the axe clear through her neck. Her lifeless body fell forward onto mine as her head hit the ground with a thud. Her head fell in such a way that her eyes still stared at me and I decided that I was not done with her yet. A rage filled me, reminded me of all my past failures and I threw her dead body down as I raced to the kitchen for my butcher knife. Once I was back in the attic, I started stabbing her over and over again. I found my body covered in blood and that only served to enrage me more. I made sure to stab every part of her body, grunting, screaming, crying as I went, tears of joy and sadness for I had killed the only woman I had ever loved. I felt free and dead at the same time, who would ever comfort me again like she could? As I realized the severity of my deed, I decided that I would dismember her completely. Each time I cut across an artery, more blood would squirt out at me. Each time I cut a limb off, the tendons that held her muscles together would snap back, the noise they made was unbearable and I found myself

vomiting all over her dismembered corpse. I feared that someone would see me carry her out, after all someone had to have seen her come in to see me all those times. How would I explain her disappearance? Her family had to know about me, surely she'd mentioned me to them before. I remembered those loose bricks in the attic wall. I had tried fixing them once, but had left it for later when my mistress had come to visit me. How ironic that it was now to be her final resting place. I started taking them down, my movements becoming more frantic as each second passed. The panic of the moment had really started to settle in now, and I was struggling to even breathe, as the air reeked of blood, vomit, feces and urine. In my haste I did not bother to wrap her up in cloth or anything the like. I put all the pieces that once made her up behind the recess and then started piling the bricks back up. I felt myself get tired very quickly now, much more quickly than I thought normal, but attributed it to the shock I was surely feeling after having killed another human being, one that I loved so. I got about three-fourths of the wall

back up and then started to waver in and out of consciousness. I was drenched in blood, I felt like I was swimming in it. My hand reached up to place another brick but that's when I succumbed to the shock and horror of my deed. I passed out and fell to the ground.

The police found me the next day when they came by to interview me about the accident at the factory. They could not believe the wretched scene and it was not until many years later that a doctor at the mental institution I now call home explained to me what it was they found. You see there never was a dark mistress. That person that I had known for so long, that I had loved so deeply, was no more than a figment of my own imagination.

They explained to me that my depression was so profound, so overpowering, that I created a person to explain it. That day after the factory accident, I stabbed myself seventeen times about the face, neck and abdomen. The tendons I heard snapping were my own as I cut off my own foot and arm. The fact that I survived so long is a miracle they tell me.



"New Age Flapper"

Maria Matienzo

B&W Photography

# FOOLED

Madelaine Triana

After so long  
I thought I've forgotten your touch.  
How could it be that I still feel you?  
What have your influences stolen from my soul?  
Maybe,  
Your influences didn't steal anything.  
Maybe,  
My own sub consciousness purposely surrendered,  
To the existence of someone else's embrace  
For its first time.

I suppose it was a thirst.  
My own thirst,  
Fooled by your quencher.  
Yet,  
My foolish thoughts seem to impose,  
Some kind of forgiveness,  
Some form of pardon,  
Towards the semi-healed scars you still pick at.  
You continuously,  
Still find a way to last in my thoughts,  
Endlessly.

Just when I believed you were only a personal realization,  
I repeatedly came across this still-point,  
Where you have concurred to dominate a piece of my art;  
My life's art.  
Life every precious piece recorded down in history,  
You will always hang as one of the very few mystical memories  
That I possess on my hidden wall.

And now,  
Just when I thought  
I would've forgotten your touch,  
I was only,  
Truly,  
Fooling myself.

## **MARCH OF THE STRIPPED**

Haley Honeysett

In the camps I never slept. How could I? The rooms echoed with the cries of women who have been torn from every comfort they have ever known. We were all going through the same thing, but we never talked. Maybe it was the shock of it all that enhanced our silence or maybe the lack of food and energy.

At night, I hated myself. I laid in bed not thinking of the horrible situation I was thrown into or even a way to escape this hell. Rather, I went to a fantasy world where I was in college dating a handsome young man that held my hand and kissed my neck. In my dreams, he would pick me up in his gloss black car and take me to eat lasagna. These thoughts would blossom my feelings of guilt, but I could not control my nomadic mind.

I was unaffected in that hole until the day I saw my father. He was in the distance at the men's camp. He was waiting in a line that seemed to stretch two soccer fields. I ran to him on instinct. Before I had gotten 10 yards, a guard in a muted green uniform forced me to the ground. He had grabbed my ponytail and dragged me across the rock-riden road. I must have called out "Daddy!" through this ordeal. The guard gripped me by the fat of my cheeks, pinching so hard I thought my teeth would break off into my mouth.

"That was the last time you will ever see your daddy, you filthy jew!" the guard barked. As he flung my head back my eye caught a wad of spit. I rolled onto my side and closed my eyes. I could feel the warm spit slowly run down my face onto the ground. From that moment my nighttime fantasies were not of my imaginary handsome boyfriend, but instead haunted by the image of my lifeless father.

## MIDNIGHT BLUE

Grant Abraham

One late night while I was writing  
I overheard the quill and ink bottle fighting  
Though at first it was quite frightening,  
I mustered my courage and listened to the vying:

*I provide the bridge between the paper and the writer*  
said the quill, speaking of himself to the ink.  
*It is I who is more important in the grand scheme,*  
*For only I provide the method and the means*  
*To bridge the way between paper and dreams.*

*Verily,*  
began the ink bottle  
*What you say is true,*  
*but without me the paper will never dye blue.*  
*Think of the way all things coincide*  
*Ponder what the Earth would be like*  
*If I did not have the sun for light.*  
*Life is a symbiosis of sorts*  
said he  
*We could not live without each other, you see.*

The bickering continued on for a minute or more  
As the two fought outside my door  
But as I pressed on to continue my chore  
I heard a shout, a crash outside my door

Breaking from my work to deduce the matter  
I followed the trail of ink to the splatter  
The broken glass shards littered the rug  
And the quill lay on the desk, stained with blue blood.



"Old Time Mobster"

Maria Matienzo

Photograph/Found Art

# IT DEVOURIED ME WHOLE

Melissa Cox

**I**t was late now, almost 3:00am. I waited until she was asleep before I left my room. I tried to go downstairs quietly, but my mind was frantic and it was hard to. When I knew there was no way she could hear me I ran to the kitchen and ripped open the fridge. I grabbed the leftover pasta and about a quarter of the chicken that was in there. I threw them on the counter and ran over to the pantry. I picked up chips, cookies, graham crackers: anything I could find. I flung them onto the counter too. I started eating, a bite of this and a mouthful of that; stuffing everything I could down my throat. The cookies crumbled at my mouth and they felt dry going down. The chicken was cold and had hard, dry skin. I don't know how old the pasta was but it was soggy and everything had blended in with it. I washed it all down with milk and it made everything much smoother. I think I devoured everything that was on the counter before it was time to happen again.

I ran upstairs to the bathroom. I was a pro now. I knew which steps not to tread on so I wouldn't wake my mom up. I locked the door behind me, I threw myself over the toilet and submerged my head in its breach. I rammed my fingers into my mouth, it was so sore but I had to. I brought up everything I'd just eaten, and I tasted the acid with my tongue before the food left. I felt my stomach turning because I needed the food so badly. I felt my head pounding, like a screwdriver was boring its way through my temple. The stench from my vomit was so strong that it aggravated my eyes. I wiped them with my hands, but I just got sick on my face and in my hair.

When I was finished, I fell to the floor in pain. I held onto the rug while I turned over on my stomach and continued to cough. It burned like hell but I couldn't stop. The fibers were rough on my fingers but they were good to hold onto. My head was light; a dizzy sensation was taking over me. I was lying in my own muck now, wondering how my life had come to this. I couldn't eat anything without it coming back up. I was so miserable I couldn't even stand myself.

How did I let it get this far? Why hadn't anyone helped me? My eyelids were getting heavy. I could see puke everywhere; it was a horrid deep orange color. Like some kind of disease, it was messing up my mom's nice bathroom. I closed my eyes; I couldn't look at it any longer. My head felt like it was floating on a cloud. It was placid and light. I thought back to a few months ago and memories of how I had come to this flooded my mind.

"You didn't do what I told you," my mom said.

"I know, but I still got it didn't I?"

"But you're only modeling part time. If you'd done what I said, you would have been doing it full time."

"It's okay Mom, I'm happy with how it turned out."

"I'm not, you could have done better."

"I'll try harder next time, okay?"

She nodded in agreement but I knew in her head she was still talking to me. I didn't want to listen to what she had to say right now. All I cared about was that I got into the modeling agency. I couldn't wait to tell Mike and my friends. I tried out for it a few times before, but I didn't make it. Mainly because I was too young. But I was 17 now and they accepted me. My mom didn't keep quiet for long, I knew she wouldn't. The words came out fluent and strong. What techniques I should have used, how I should have posed differently, and how I should have smiled more. I knew she meant well, she's done this all before, but I really wasn't interested. I drowned out her voice with the sound of the radio.

We reached home around 5:00 and I went to my room to change. I was going to see a movie tonight with Mike and then we were going to meet some friends. Mike was my boyfriend and he has been for about two years. He was the same age as me, so my parents didn't have any real problems with our relationship. He was mature for his age, so he knew what he wanted out of it, and what I wanted. We were friends for a long time before we got together, so I knew that he really cared about me. The only problem that I had with Mike was that he smoked. He was a stoner and everyone who knew him knew it too. I've talked to him about it and tried to

help him quit, but he just hasn't been able to. Whenever we argue, it's about weed. I know that it's messing him up and it pisses me off because there's so much he can do with his life.

I was dressed now, in a black top and cord skirt. I had nice legs and I liked to show them off. I went into the kitchen where my mom was eating dinner. I walked to the cooker, shared some food out for myself and sat down with her.

"I thought you were going out to eat with your friends," she asked.

"I am," I replied. "But I am hungry now, and the movie's probably going to be long."

My mom shook her head at me, but I carried on eating. The food was warm going down my throat and it settled nicely in my stomach. I finished and got up.

"That was nice Mom," I said.

"I can see that by the food around your mouth," she replied.

A bit embarrassed, I quickly picked up a napkin and wiped my mouth. I kissed her as I left. Just as I picked up my purse, she shouted at me what time I had to be home. I limply waved my hand at her. I didn't need to be reminded of my curfew every time I went out. Mike only lived a few streets away from me, so I usually walked to his house when we were going out. It was hot after 7:00. Even though the sun was resting, the air still carried the heat and made me take off my jacket. I walked peacefully along glancing around at my neighborhood. The only word to describe it was random. Not one house on my street was the same. Each had something to differentiate it from the next one. For some reason the house across from mine kept its Christmas lights up all year round. The family a few houses down always kept their garage open letting the whole world see their business. The dad of the family was always shredding masses of paper in there as if he was doing something top secret for the government. Another house was covered with objects devoted to Christ. Their welcome mat said, "Christ welcomes you," and their front door had a gold cross on it. As I walked past that house loud gospel music seeped through the windows. If the outside of the house looked like this, I couldn't imagine what inside was like.

It took me about 10 minutes to walk to

Mike's house and he was sitting on his step waiting for me. He rose when I got close. The first thing I noticed when I first met Mike was his curly hair. It was so soft and dark, almost kind of girly. It was his trademark. It felt so good to touch but when he didn't wash it, the smell of weed would linger in between his curls. When I was face-to-face with him, I kissed him gently on the lips. He was taller than me so he kissed me on my nose. It was small and button-like and he said it was perfect for just that. I stepped back and we walked to his car. We buckled up, he started the engine and pulled out of his driveway.

"How'd it go today?" he asked.

My head was leaning on the headrest and I had turned to face him. I didn't know why but I was really smitten with him right now and all I wanted to do was look at him. He had definitive facial features, like both his mind and body knew exactly who he was. You could tell by looking at him. He had dark eyes to match his hair and he was about average build.

"It went great," I finally said.

I explained to him how my audition went and my mom's negativity about it afterwards.

"When's your first show then?" he asked.

"Next weekend, I'm rehearsing all week."

"I'll get to see the show won't I?"

I laughed. "Of course you will."

We talked some more until we reached the 24 screen multiplex. As we left the car and went in the direction of the ticket booth, Mike took my hand and intertwined our fingers. I couldn't help but smile when he did that and I squeezed his hand tightly. We bought our tickets and went straight inside. Comfortably seated at the back, I lifted up the armrest between us so I could lean on him. The movie lasted for about two hours and was supposedly a comedy. The only time I really laughed was when Mike made a joke about something not even related to the show. We were meeting my friends, Becky and Alex, at a restaurant near the theater. We headed straight there and went inside. It was named The Greenery and had a casual buffet type style. You could sit at the large oak tables or in the leather green booths. The food was laid out in the center so it was easily accessible to everyone. They had a long salad bar with every kind of vegetable, different soups

and pasta, warm bread and they had a section at the end for dessert. There was music playing in the back but mostly you could hear the sound of happy people chatting. As soon as we passed a couple of tables we saw them and joined them immediately. Alex was black and had short black hair. She was one of those positive people that thinks life is great and it suited her petite, spunky body. Becky had long black hair, green eyes and was the most serious one of the three of us. She was the mom of the group.

We all said our hellos and gave hugs and then proceeded to the buffet line. I was first and I wasn't in the mood for salad so my plate was comprised of pasta and bread. I also took a bowl of tomato soup; I loved hot food that you could really taste going down. The four of us reseated and as I ate I played with Mike's hair. I guess it was rude or inappropriate because some people started to stare, but I didn't care and neither did he. We talked mostly about my audition, the rehearsals I had in the week and upcoming shows. It seemed to be the topic of the day. We laughed and chatted throughout the night. A waiter actually came over to shush us.

"You guys, we're being a bit loud," Becky said.

The three of us looked at each other and cracked up. She frowned and carried on picking at her salad. We finished eating at about 11:00. Mike dropped Becky and Alex home, then me. We sat outside my house for a while.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" he asked.

"Nothing really, just homework."

"I'll come over in the evening then."

I kissed him meaning it was fine with me. I left his car and made my way to the house.

On Sunday morning, I shared my time up between eating breakfast and various other snacks, watching television and playing games on the computer. Pretty aimless stuff, but it was Sunday. By lunchtime I had finally sat down with my parents, who had finally gotten up. I was eating quietly while they talked. My dad turned away from the conversation mid-sentence and congratulated me on yesterday.

"Thanks, I'm so glad I finally got in," I said.

"So are you practicing today?"

"No, during the week. I'm just doing homework today."

"And you're going to the gym."

I looked at my mom because the comment was from her.

"Why? I don't need to go," I said.

"You do Blair. I've been watching you and you seem to eat quite a lot, but you're not doing anything to work it off."

I was surprised. She'd never said anything like this before.

"I must have a fast metabolism or something." I said.

"No, I don't think so."

My mom stood up from the table.

"If you want to be permanent with the company you have to work hard."

"But I got in, didn't I?" I asked.

"But at the lowest level. I'm going to the gym later, you can come with me. It'll be fun."

She gave me a false smile. It was harsh coming from her because she is my mother and she never did that. I looked down at my plate and I got a funny feeling in my stomach. Did I really eat that much? I had a couple crackers and half a sandwich left on my plate. I pushed it away from me and rose from my chair.

Silently, I left my dad alone and the rest of my food untouched. When I was upstairs I closed my bedroom door behind me and took off my sweater. I had one layer of clothing on now. I glared at myself in the mirror. It was posted to my wall. I had real long legs; I knew that. My stomach was flat, my chest wasn't that big but enough for me. My arms were skinny and fell all the way down to my thighs. I slapped them and they jiggled a bit. I pinched my hips and felt extra skin, or was it fat, I didn't know. Maybe I did need to go to the gym. I'd never really thought about it. I'd always just eaten what I wanted because I didn't think it was a big deal. I was going to model now, so maybe I should. I peeled my eyes away from the image looking back at me and slumped on my bed. Why did I have to think about this now? I was fine before. I looked at the clock and it read 2:25. I didn't know what time my mom was leaving, but I wanted to take a nap. I climbed into my bed, let my eyes close and fell asleep.

I awoke about three hours later by my

mom's cold hand touching my face. I grunted but I didn't move. She tapped me again.

"I'm up," I moaned.

"Hurry up Blair, I have other things to do today."

"I'm up, Mom."

She left and I clambered out of bed. Naps are supposed to make you feel rejuvenated, but I just felt groggy. I changed into my sweats and met her downstairs in the car. At the ToneUp, Tone Down gym, my mom had a membership card, so I was put down as a visitor. It was a big place with two floors. The bottom floor had squash courts, basketball courts and indoor tennis. The floor, which is where we were, had treadmills, bicycle, weights and things like that. I felt completely lost. I tried going on the step master but quit after five minutes because it got too hard. Then I tried the weights but I couldn't do that either. I sat there on the black cushion wondering why I had really come. I wasn't doing anything. It was a complete waste of time. I looked at the people around me. There was one man sweating like no other. He was really working that treadmill. Another person was collecting a drink from one of the vending machines and vigorously wiped his forehead. I wasn't going to do any more work, I knew that much. I found a spot on the other side of the gym so my mom couldn't see me. She was across the room using one of those big plastic balls. I crouched down in the corner and watched the television that was above me. About fifty minutes later I searched for my mom. I walked through the smelly sweaty people to get to her. The stench was strong and I had to cover my nose. She was on the rower but she had to be finished by now.

"Are you done yet Mom?"

"Yeah, almost." She looked at me, "You look like you didn't do anything!"

"Yeah I did," I said. "I went on the step master, and all that stuff over there," pointing at various equipment.

She crinkled her face as if she knew I was lying so I looked away. She pedaled fast for the last few minutes on the rowing machine. She did her cool down stretches and then we left. When we got home, I showered and changed even though I didn't really work out. I started on my homework and waited for Mike to come

over. It got to almost 9:00 and he hadn't come. Nor had he called. I tried calling him but I got his answering machine. If he hadn't come around he'd better have a good reason for it. I hoped with everything in me, that he hadn't blown me off to go and smoke.

I didn't pay attention in any classes in school the next day. I just waited for the clock to get to 2:40 and then bolted out of there. My friends knew where I was going so I didn't need to explain to them. Mike hadn't come to school today and it weighed heavy on my mind. I couldn't afford to think about it now though. Within minutes I drove to the agency, parked, and went inside. They had a wide open room that was used for practicing. The catwalk was in there too. It was always vented and had plainly painted walls so the models didn't get distracted. I went in there and sat down with the other girls. I'd met most of them already at the audition; there were about 10 of us. I sat next to a girl I knew pretty well, Bianca. She was just as tall as me, had strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes. She was always so hyper and excited about modeling, like it put her on some kind of high.

"Hey Bi," I said, and I gave her a hug.

"Hey," she replied. "Are you excited about today?"

"Yeah, I..."

I didn't get to finish my sentence because our coordinator came in. She was a real friendly woman and had administered the auditions. She began by telling us what we would be doing in rehearsals today and what the show was going to be about. We would be modeling the work of a new designer. I was intrigued so I listened closely. After about 50 minutes of talk, when all the girls including myself, began to get rowdy, Sue the coordinator, let us go and eat. I sat with Bianca. I didn't eat as much as I normally did. The gym wasn't going to become my best friend but my mother's comments had really gotten to me. I watched the other girls as I ate and pretty much all of them had the same as me. Except for Bianca, her plate was full and she practically inhaled her food. Before I knew it she was finished and went straight to the bathroom. A few minutes had passed and she hadn't come out. I was done eating so I went in to find her. There were only three

stalls in the bathroom; two were empty. I saw her feet, she was crouched down, and I heard her throwing up. She came out, after she flushed the toilet and was startled to see me there. Her eyes were wide, and she looked pale. She wiped her mouth then walked to the sink. She was smiling when she looked back up at me. I lifted up my hands in confusion waiting for an explanation.

"What?" she said.

"Why were you throwing up, are you sick?"

She laughed. "No, I do it all the time, it's no big deal."

"That's not the first time you've thrown up?"

"No."

"But why do you do it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Because it beats working out. I eat whatever I want then throw up, it's a synch really."

My brain was trying to process what she was saying. I shifted from my left to my right and placed my hand on my hip.

"Look," she said, "I've been with this place for almost two years, they almost let me go last year because I gained a couple pounds. I couldn't work it off and someone told me about throwing the food back up. I tried it and it worked and now..."

Someone barged into the door, causing it to swing open. We both turned around.

"Sue wants us back in there," the girl said.

We nodded and I turned back to Bianca.

"It can't be good for you though."

"Once you see what working for this place is like, you'll understand. You should try it sometime it gives you a rush."

I screwed up my face as she left me alone in the bathroom. I tried to piece together what she was saying but water dripped from the bathroom tap and messed up my thoughts. Did she really have to do that to keep up? I sneaked back into the room and sat down with the other girls. Bianca was on stage prancing up and down. Everyone stared at her in awe as she did it so effortlessly. Like she was born with the ability to walk with ease and grace. I wondered if anyone knew she had just thrown her guts up. She was smiling and looked so happy, how did she do it? Sue called us up one by one to walk the catwalk.

When it was my turn I made my way to the stairs and walked up stage. The light shone brightly in my face. It made me squint so I asked the techie to turn it down. He did and I stood up straight. I strutted down the catwalk, smiling when I thought necessary and swinging my arms at the perfect distance. There was no music, just the murmur of voices, so I had to try and walk to my own rhythm. I posed at the end and then made my way off stage. I waited for my comments from Sue. She gave me thumbs up but remained silent. Was that it? She'd said something for all the other girls but why not me. I exchanged looks with Bianca, but she just shrugged. At the end of rehearsal, I pulled Sue aside and asked her how I did today. She ushered me to follow her to her office. She sat down in there but I stood up. She looked through some papers and for a moment I thought she'd forgotten I was in there. She soon spoke.

"You're a part time model, aren't you?"

"Yeah, but I just wanted to know about my walk today because you didn't say anything."

"You're good Blair but you need work.

Mainly your facial expressions and posing."

"There's something wrong with my face?"

"No, you have a gorgeous face."

She took a minute to survey me. Gray eyes, oval face, brown hair. I heard her mumble it.

"So I just..."

"You just need to work on your expressions, you know, how you present yourself."

I nodded.

"What size pants do you wear?" she asked.

"Uh, a seven sometimes a nine."

"Okay you may need to work on that too."

My mouth dropped. Was she kidding?

"Don't look so surprised," she said.

I was a bit offended. Could people see parts of me that I couldn't? Did I even see what they did?

"Here are some things you can do to lose weight," as she handed me a piece of paper, "and it also has techniques for your face and body. Practice those for next time, okay?"

I took the paper from her.

"If I need so much work why did you

guys take me on?"

"You have potential, that's why you're only part time right now. Work hard, and you can be full time."

I left her office confused. Why was the issue of my body coming up? I studied the paper she'd given me. There were things on there like going to the gym five times a week, an hour of running a day and hire a personal trainer. I couldn't do half this stuff. I didn't have the time or money. Bianca was right, no wonder she threw up. I drove home listening to the radio, trying to think straight. I knew it was crazy, but I needed to talk to my mom. She'd been through all this I'm sure. When I got home I found her in her room. I told her what had happened and showed her the paper.

"I told you, Blair."

"I know you did, but..."

"I told you over and over again, you need to work, but you thought you were too good."

"No I didn't, I just..."

"It's simple Blair, eat less and work out."

"But..."

"No questions, just listen to what I am saying."

Why did I bother? Why?

"Isn't there any other way?" I asked

"No. Just suck it up. You wanted to model and now you do."

She lectured me for a good half hour. I was almost in tears by the time I left the room. I didn't understand why she had to be so harsh on me. She didn't even want to listen to me. What was I going to do? Resort to throwing up? Bianca looked so good and she did it. Maybe I should try it. Just once.



"Vintage Radio"

Grant Abraham

Drawn Artwork

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